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135

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ISSUE 135
WELCOME

Welcome to the latest issue of **Advanced Photoshop**. This issue we delve into one of the big trends in artwork at the moment: low poly. This issue has everything you need for a masterpiece!

APRIL MADDEN
Editor

IN THIS ISSUE:

- TYPOGRAPHY
- ILLUSTRATION
- PHOTOMANIPULATION
- DIGITAL PAINTING
- LOW-POLY

There are two ways to create low-poly artwork, and we take a look at both of them this issue. 3D low poly is created by combining 3D models with Photoshop techniques, and we've got a complete tutorial on p46 to help you create it with the aid of a free 3D program. 2D low poly is created using vectors in either Photoshop or a mix of Photoshop and Illustrator. Our cover artist explains how he created his 2D low-poly piece on p52. We also speak to digital artist JR Schmidt on p12 to discover the secrets behind his masterful low-poly style.

Elsewhere in the issue we take a good look at Photoshop's type tools and how to use them (p28), explore masking techniques to turn photos into professional-quality paintings (p56) and discover how to use clipping masks in creative ways (p66). Our experts share their 20 top Photoshop tips for better illustrations, and we get hands on with the Editors Key's Photoshop CC keyboard too.

Enjoy the issue!

COVER IMAGE

WOJTEK FUS
fb.com/fus.wojtek

Wojtek Fus is a 22-year-old concept designer and illustrator. Working as a freelancer, he creates concept art, promotional illustrations and pitch art for games and animations. This is part of a series of works.

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ADVANCED PHOTOSHOP.co.uk

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THE WORLD BUILDER
JR Schmidt's unique style combines 3D and Processing with Photoshop to stunning effect

66 WORKSHOP:
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Get more from clipping masks by combining them with illustrative elements

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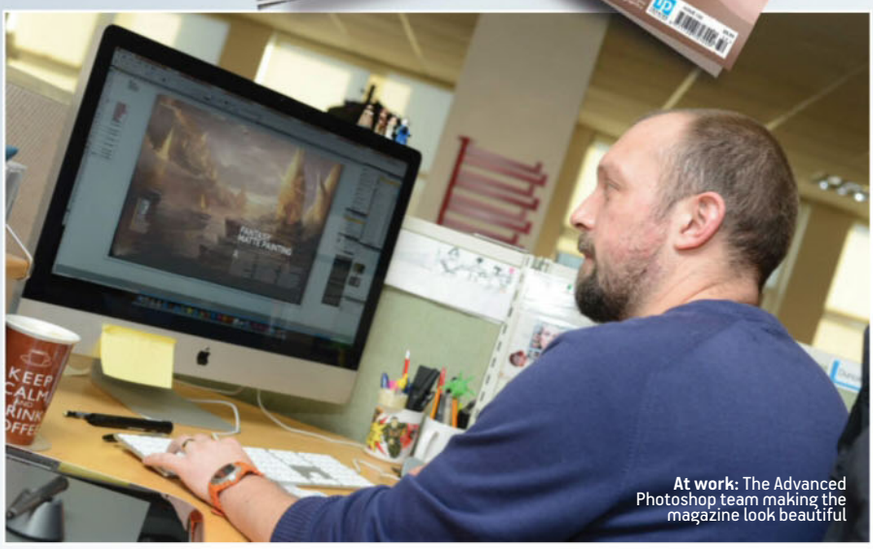
We love creating **Advanced Photoshop** and we hope you love reading it too. That's why we're asking you to tell us what you want from your magazine. Our quick three-minute survey lets you tell us exactly what you want to see, from the kind of artwork you like to the Photoshop techniques you want to learn. Share your opinions with us today and make a difference to your magazine. We can't wait to see your thoughts!

APRIL MADDEN
Editor



At work: The Advanced Photoshop team making the magazine look beautiful

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ADVANCED PHOTOSHOP® PRO PANEL

MEET THE PROFESSIONALS SHARING THEIR PHOTOSHOP EXPERTISE AND TECHNIQUES IN THIS ISSUE

ALEKSEI PUSHILIN

www.behance.net/plannit

Using as little as you can to achieve as much as you want is a big deal for any designer or illustrator. Low-poly art for 3D design is like pixel-based art for flat illustrations: you simply scale up the technique. If you are able to make the model you want in one hundred polygons or one hundred pixels, a few million of them are not a problem any more.

■ **Find out more about Aleksei Pushilin's low-poly techniques in his tutorial on p46**

© Aleksei Pushilin

MARY WINKLER

www.acrylicana.com

Use gradients to speed up rendering illustrated work. Create a new layer, use the Lasso tool to select a section of shadow or highlight, and use the Gradient tool to place a linear or radial gradient that goes from transparent to your fill colour. This will speed up the process of rendering shadows, highlights, and even blocks of colour.

■ **Discover more tricks for speeding up illustrations in Mary Winkler's tutorial on p66**

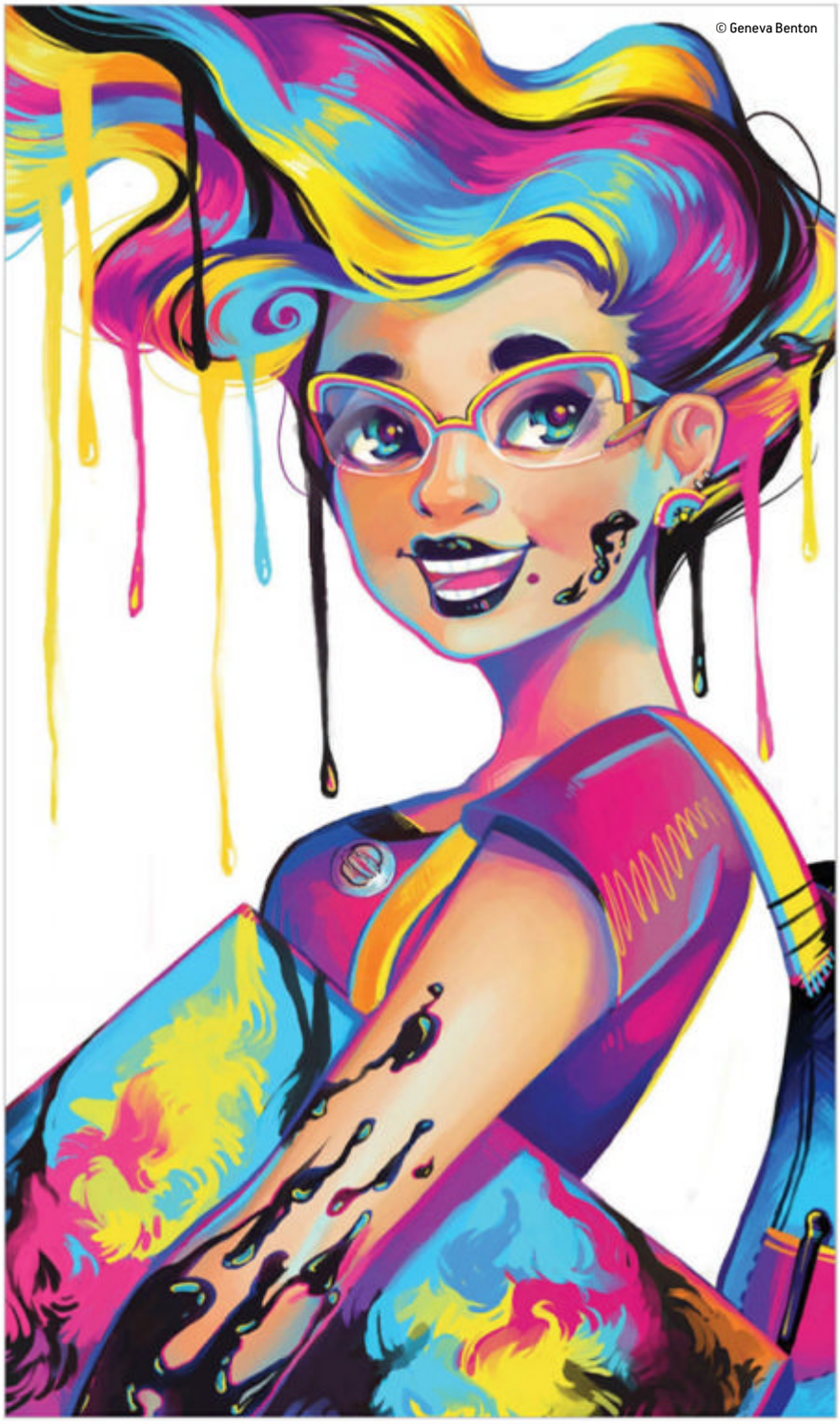
> "Colour schemes can really breathe life into an art piece and set its mood. Don't be afraid to play around with different colour schemes"
>
> GENEVA BENTON / **GENEVAB.COM**

© Mary Winkler

GENEVA BENTON
genevab.com

Colour schemes can really breathe life into an art piece and set its mood. Don't be afraid to play around with different colour schemes and use them to your advantage in your art. Feel free to experiment with different shades, but also don't be afraid to go back to the basic, tried and true schemes and deviate from there.

■ **Get more digital art advice from Geneva Benton in her tutorial on p56**



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WIN A SHARE OF $9184 WITH ARTGEMINI

THE ARTGEMINI PRIZE IS BACK FOR A THIRD EDITION WITH AN EVEN BIGGER PRIZE POOL AND EXHIBITION AT THE MENIER GALLERY

Born to promote international contemporary art for emerging and established artists all around the world, the ArtGemini Prize certainly presents a very tempting event to enter.

Though it does cost money to enter with a minimum Single Entry Price of £20, there is no age limit for applicants to the independent competition. It's also open to artists from anywhere in the world – and there is a total prize pool of £6000 ($9184) as well as an exclusive exhibition of your work in London if you get selected as a finalist.

"Shortlisted artists have opportunity to further their careers," explained Vanessa Champion, founder of PhotoAid Global. "Ellie Davies – [the] first prize winner of the Photography ArtGemini Prize 2014, had her work selected for the Singapore Art Fair. Three of her prints were sold in Singapore." Entries submitted will also benefit from being seen by some very influential judges including Dr Christina Bradstreet from the National Gallery, Sarah Ryan from New Blood Art, and Zoe Wishaw, a commercial photography consultant who was previously European director of photography at Getty Images.

Any potential applicants to the ArtGemini Prize will have four categories to submit to. The Painting and Sculpture prize will see first, second and third place winners win £2,000, £1,000, and £500 respectively; while the Young Artist Prize of £250 will go to a creative under 25. The Photography Prize is divided into two categories with Professional winning £1000 in prize money and Amateur winning £500. A third sub-category, the Special PhotoAid Award sponsored by PhotoAid Global this year, will be looking specifically for the best social or environmental documentary image submitted and awarded £500. Finally, the Public Choice Prize of £250 will be fully open for voting by the public during the final ArtGemini exhibition, and the winner will be announced at the end of the show.

After entries close on 7 July this year, the jury will draw up a long list of up to 120 works from all the images submitted online before shortlisting up to 40 works by 4 August for the finalists' exhibition in London. After viewing each shortlisted work individually, judges will then select the prize winners except for the Public Choice prize.

"The 2015 finalists exhibition and private view will be held in September at the Menier Gallery, which is situated within the historic Menier Chocolate Factory, minutes from London Bridge, Borough Market and Tate Modern," revealed Champion. "Plus all photographers who enter the photojournalism category will be considered for potential partnership with PhotoAid in the UK and potentially abroad in their education and travel programmes."

For further information on the ArtGemeni prize and information on how to enter, visit **www.artgeminiprize.com**.

> "The 2015 finalists exhibition and private view will be held in September at the Menier Gallery, which is situated within the historic Menier Chocolate Factory, minutes from London Bridge, Borough Market and Tate Modern"
>
> **Vanessa Champion, founder of PhotoAid Global**

ArtGemini Aims: *Between the Trees* by Ellie Davies. The aims of the prize are to promote creativity and excellence around the world, help artists to exhibit and sell works in London, and to support a selected charity with a cash donation each year

Winning work by Ellie Davies: View the shortlisted artists from previous years to get an idea of what the judges are looking for at www.artgeminiprize.com/shortlisted-artists-2013/ shortlisted-artists-2014/

HOW TO ENTER

- Decide on the category and the number of works you wish to enter.
- Acceptable media: Painting, including oil, mixed medium, acrylic, watercolour, drawing, ink, calligraphy and original print, photography, digital art and selfie (new). Maximum size 100 x 100cm. Sculpture – maximum size 50 x 50 x 50cm.
- Images of works must be in jpeg format. Recommended ideal size is 1MB, with minimum size 250KB, maximum 2MB. For best viewing, ArtGemini recommend a maximum resolution of 300 dpi and pixel dimensions of 1024 pixels or more wide.
- Maximum size is 120 x 120cm including frame except sculpture where maximum size is 50 x 50 x 50 cm.
- You may enter up to three (six for photography) original works created in the last three years. Any work submitted must be available for sale in the exhibition if shortlisted.

See more at **www.artgeminiprize.com/how-to-enter.**

IS THIS AWARD-WINNING APP A MINIATURE PHOTOSHOP?

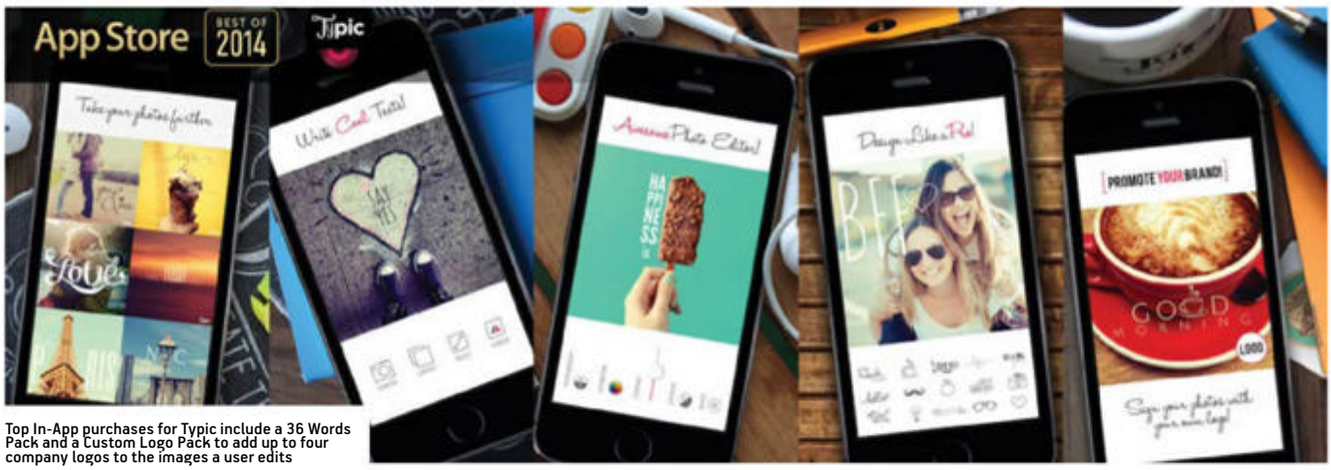
TYPIC ALLOWS USERS TO NOT ONLY EDIT PHOTOS WITH FILTER AND EFFECTS BUT ALSO ADD TEXT, DESIGN ELEMENTS, AND EVEN A PERSONALISED LOGO

Since its 2012 launch by Columbia-based tech company Hi Mom, innovative photography app Typic has been enjoyed by millions of users around the world. Now, the Typic team is celebrating as the app – available to download both on iPhone and iPad – achieves a huge global success with more than 3.5 million downloads and counting. In fact, it's officially become the number one photo and video app in over 70 countries.

With unique photo filters and effects along with the ability for users to add inspiring text in 84 different fonts, as well as 240 different design elements that give photos a professional final touch, it's easy to see why. Users can even add up to four versions of their personal or company logo to photos as an In-App purchase, an invaluable option for anyone hoping to promote their brand.

Hi Mom co-founders Julián Urrego, Steve Urrego and Margarita Acosta set out to create a photography app that was not only functional and easy to use, which also made Typic a huge hit with children. In response to the overwhelming demand Hi Mom released Typic Kids in February 2014; a child friendly version of the app created to inspire the minds of budding young designers.

For more information about the Typic apps visit **www.typicapp.com** or simply search Typic in the Apple App Store. Both Typic and Typic Kids are priced at £1.49/$1.99.



Top In-App purchases for Typic include a 36 Words Pack and a Custom Logo Pack to add up to four company logos to the images a user edits

BUY A COLORMUNKI AND GET A YEAR'S WORTH OF CC FREE

X-RITE LAUNCHES A COMPELLING NEW OFFER THAT WILL GIVE CREATIVES PROFESSIONAL COLOUR CALIBRATION TOGETHER WITH ONE YEAR OF LIGHTROOM AND PHOTOSHOP FOR FREE

An exciting offer for artists and Photoshop users everywhere has brought together Adobe's tools with the world's leading camera, monitor, and printer colour calibration solutions from X-Rite in a whole new way.

Now, any purchases of X-Rite's ColorMunki Photo or i1Photo Pro 2 will provide an automatic one year free membership to the Adobe Creative Cloud Photography plan. Worth £102, the plan includes access to both Lightroom and Photoshop CC. The offer is only available to users in the Middle East, Europe and Africa.

"When working in Lightroom CC, Photoshop CC or both, photographers need the confidence that they are seeing an accurate representation of their image. They need the reassurance that the adjustments they are making in these powerful applications will appear correctly on screen and in print," commented Geoffrey Clements, managing director of X-Rite Photo Europe. "The ColorMunki Photo, i1Photo Pro 2 and i1Display Pro set the standard for accurate colour management technology. They provide users with the peace of mind they need to get creative with their images."

The ColorMunki Photo and i1Photo Pro 2 enable users to colour manage their screens, printers and projectors with speed and accuracy. Combined with the creative power of Adobe Photoshop CC and the management and enhancement tools within Adobe Lightroom and Lightroom mobile, X-Rite has aimed for this offer to provide users with a comprehensive, industry standard set of tools to create, manage and accurately reproduce the very best images possible.

For those interested in X-Rite's i1Display Pro as a way to ensure a high level of on-screen colour accuracy instead, there is also the option to claim a 15% discount on a one year membership to an Adobe Creative Cloud Photography plan

Buy ColorMunki Photo for £414 and i1Photo Pro 2 for £1434.00 at **www.xritephoto.eu/adobe.**

www.cargocollective.com/jrschmidt

THE WORLD BUILDER

JR SCHMIDT'S UNIQUE STYLE COMBINES 3D AND PROCESSING WITH PHOTOSHOP TO STUNNING EFFECT. CURRENTLY A MOTION DESIGNER AT GOOGLE CREATIVE LAB, IT SEEMS THERE IS NO END TO THIS ARTIST'S TALENTS

Jeffrey Robert Schmidt is somewhat of a creative enigma. His most notable, and captivating, 3D imagery uses tiny building blocks to build colourful landscapes; he uses Processing to design stunning particle-based posters; and his work for NeonMob – a series of surreal, polygonal landscapes – is nothing short of incredible. He has the kind of versatility and inspirational skill that you'd of course expect from a designer at Google's famed Creative Lab. We caught up with Schmidt to talk style, technique and thinking differently as a creative.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR BACKGROUND AS AN ARTIST AND DESIGNER?

When I was younger I focused mostly on traditional art – drawing, painting, a little sculpture and so on. My interest in video games heavily influenced my desire to pursue 3D graphics, and continues to influence my work today. After I graduated I was planning on majoring in film and animation, but I decided to switch to something I had never heard of – a programme at the Rochester Institute of Technology called New Media Design. It ended up being one of the best decisions of my career because I was exposed to a huge variety of technologies in addition to film and animation: web-design, illustration, interactive design, scripting, object-oriented programming, programmatic art, and on and on. After college I worked in advertising for a couple of years and eventually started to feel pretty disillusioned – that drove me to do a lot more personal illustration work. Eventually I wound up at the Creative Lab at Google, which has been great so far.

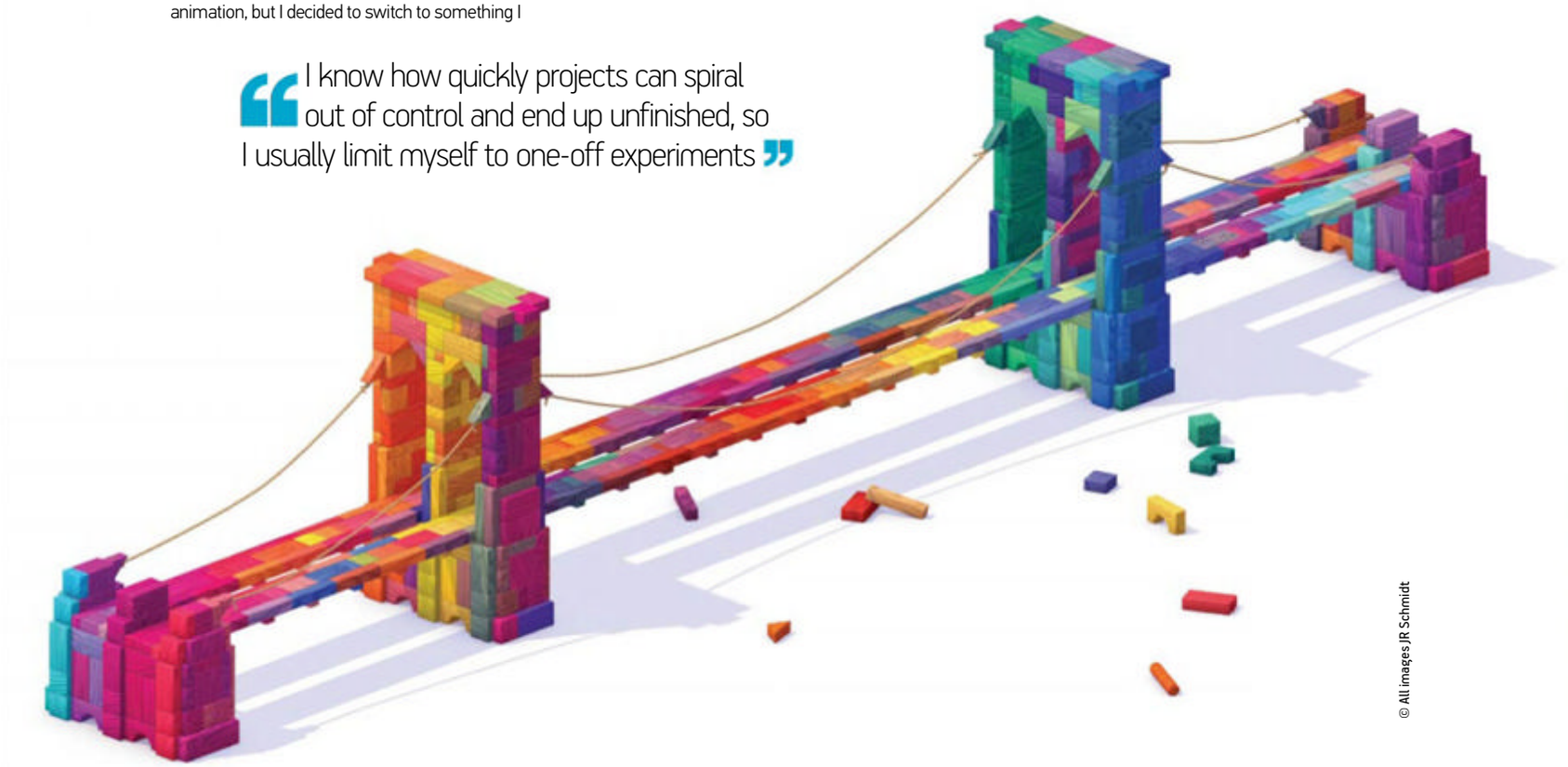
SO WHAT'S YOUR ROLE AT GOOGLE CREATIVE LAB AND HOW DOES IT INSPIRE YOU?

Coming from an agency background, the Creative Lab was refreshing, unpredictable, intimidating and entirely unique. The general attitude in the lab is to do what you're excited about, so I bring a lot of 3D design into my work, along with motion graphics. I work directly on the products themselves and create content that goes out into the world, or I work with developers to guide the process. That can mean really massaging a button animation or transition so it feels just right – not too long, but long enough to show you the effects of your finger tap. Sometimes I screenshot my animation curves and send them to the engineers. The Google Creative Lab is full of people that are vastly more talented than I am. It's humbling and I feel incredibly fortunate to work there.

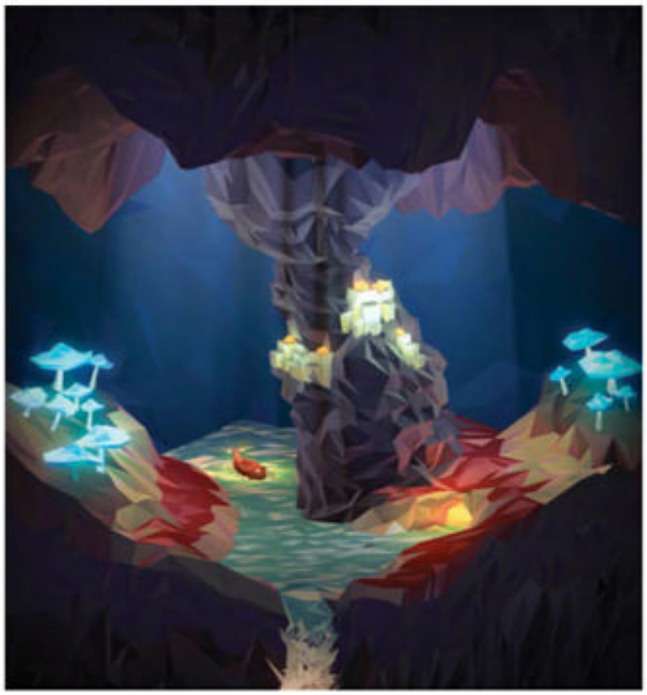
HOW WOULD YOU SUM UP YOUR STYLE AND WHAT DRIVES YOU TO CREATE YOUR IMAGES?

To be honest, I'm not sure I can meaningfully pin down my own style, whatever it is, and even if I did it would be constantly changing. Right now I think it's interesting how people react to different visual cues. What is it about an image that draws you in? For some time everyone was going crazy over polygonal-looking stuff. And for a while people just couldn't stop putting 45-degree long shadows on their icons and logos. Why is that? It really

> "I know how quickly projects can spiral out of control and end up unfinished, so I usually limit myself to one-off experiments"



© All images JR Schmidt



> The Google Creative Lab is full of people that are vastly more talented than I am. It's humbling and I feel incredibly fortunate to work there

New York: With this image, Schmidt wanted to visualise New York using toy blocks. "This image is based off of some data showing energy usage per building," he says

Polygonal posters: These stunning creations are another personal project by Schmidt. "I love isometric video game level design," he explains, "and I think that's what was inspiring me here"

fascinates me. I'm always trying to pay attention to those things that inexplicably catch on and get re-used. I try to experiment with different styles, and I think the common thread among those styles is that they stand against the tool with which they were made.

WHAT HAVE BEEN YOUR FAVOURITE RECENT PROJECTS TO WORK ON – BOTH CLIENT AND PERSONAL WORK?

I made a set of 50 isometric landscape illustrations for a startup called NeonMob (**www.neonmob.com/@jrschmidt**). It's a place for people to find and trade digital collectable illustrations. I really enjoyed making those. When I started I wasn't sure how I could possibly make them all unique. It was great challenge and very satisfying on a creative level. I'm also pretty excited about a mobile game I'm working on right now. I can't say much about it yet, but it does involve more 3D landscapes. I can't seem to get away from that subject matter.

WHAT'S USUALLY THE MOST CHALLENGING PART OF CREATING YOUR IMAGES?

Getting started is definitely the biggest challenge for me. I know how quickly projects can spiral out of control and end up unfinished, so I usually limit myself to one-off experiments. That helps me settle on something that I can get excited about and really run with.

HOW DID YOU DISCOVER YOUR POLYGONAL, BUILDING BLOCK STYLE?

I used to build with LEGO and toy blocks constantly when I was a kid. I still have this urge to build something with my hands, but at the same time I want to keep working digitally. So I tried modelling a little set of digital blocks in Cinema 4D. I thought about their proportions and measurements, made sure they would fit together however they were rotated, and I started stacking them up. The nice thing about doing this on the computer is that you never run out of blocks, so I just went crazy. I built a tower, and then I cloned it and built an even bigger tower made of smaller ones. I was careful to keep everything somewhat procedural, so I could go back in and modify one of the blocks in the set, and the rest would update.

HOW DOES PHOTOSHOP FIT INTO YOUR EVERYDAY WORKFLOW?

For still images, Photoshop is usually my last step. When I render something in 3D, I usually separate the passes – colour, shadow, specular, and so on. When I bring all the passes into Photoshop I can make adjustments to them more efficiently than if I had to re-render them each time. It's particularly useful with depth passes, black-and-white images that represent areas on which the camera is in focus. These work great with the Lens Blur filter.

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AND WHAT ARE YOUR FAVOURITE TOOLS AND FEATURES?

A while back I set about learning Processing for creating generative art. I started by writing a little script that would spawn particles and draw lines as they moved. I realised right away that the difficult thing is getting the particles to move in a way that isn't rigid and boring. My solution was to move them through little force fields that I would place when I started the script. The effect was similar to those gravity simulator games where you have to sling something through space, while it gets pulled around by all the planets. Once I had that working I pumped the particle count way up so they would flood the screen. I also tied the RGB values of each particle to their velocity and acceleration.

SIMILARLY, WHAT ABOUT YOUR STUNNING NEW YORK IMAGE? HOW DID YOU CREATE THIS AND WHAT WERE THE CHALLENGES?

I've always been inspired by maps. I started by gathering as many high-resolution maps of the city as I could find, particularly any that were driven by some kind of data. I was hoping for something that mapped building height across the city, but I ended up settling for an infographic that showed energy usage per building. I took my maps into Photoshop and started lining them all up so they were geographically the same. Using these as a base, I created maps for what I intended to building height and building colour. In Cinema 4D I modelled a few bricks. Then I built a system that cloned and coloured the bricks based on the maps I created. From there it was a process of trial and error, getting the image to look the way I wanted. The maps made it easy to make changes, so most of the work from that point on was done in Photoshop, tweaking colours. I would tweak the maps in Photoshop and the bricks would update in Cinema 4D.

> "Rather than build a castle, for some reason I have this urge to build a set of blocks first, and then get the computer to do the heavy lifting"

WHAT DO YOU THINK SEPARATES YOU FROM OTHER ARTISTS?

There are a lot of talented people in this field, and I'm not sure it's even fair for me to distinguish myself from them. If I have to pick one thing, I'd say that I enjoy building systems for making things. Rather than build a castle, for some reason I have this urge to build a set of blocks first, and then get the computer to do the heavy lifting.

FINDING YOUR STYLE

SCHMIDT'S TOP TIPS FOR FORGING YOUR STYLE AND DEVELOPING YOUR CAREER

■ **ON THE INDUSTRY**

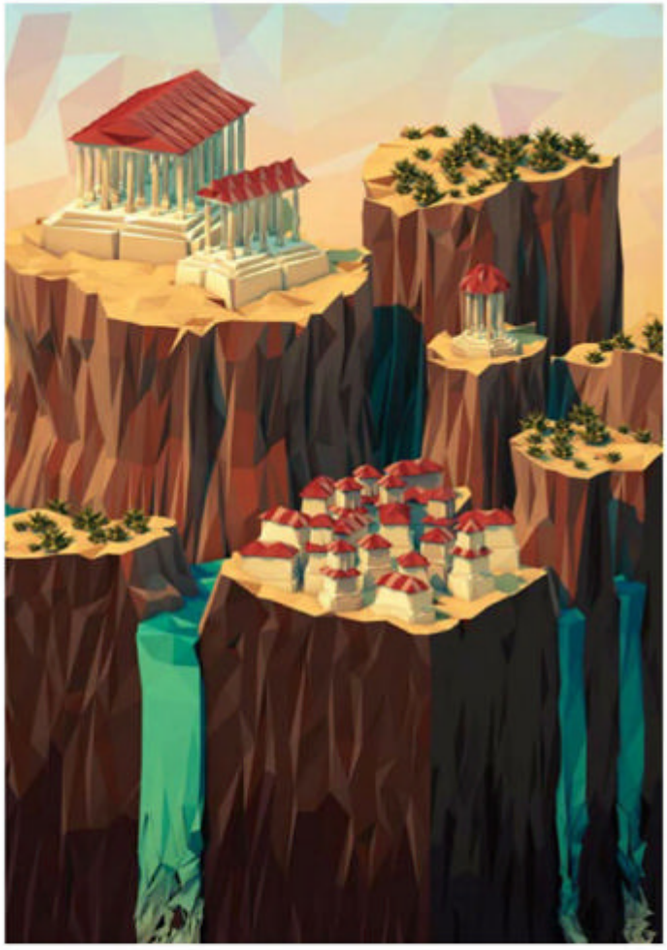
Don't be afraid to go after something different if you find yourself stuck doing something you hate. You could have played it safe and become a pharmacist, but instead you took a risk and went after an art career. That means you're entitled to love what you do, every single day.

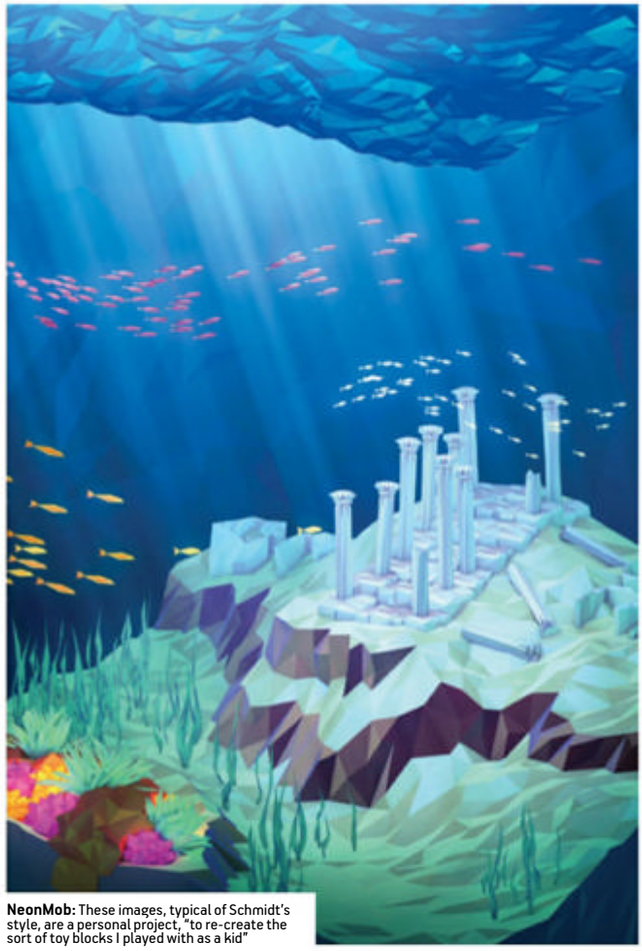
■ **ON SOFTWARE**

Master the tools but don't rely on them. Be an artist and a designer, not just a software operator. Try to keep learning things everyday.

■ **ON PORTFOLIOS**

It's better to have a few strong pieces than a big selection with not-so-great pieces mixed in. And don't put anything in there that you wouldn't want to work on again. That's the only thing people see, and when they reach out to you for work, that's what they'll ask for.





NeonMob: These images, typical of Schmidt's style, are a personal project, "to re-create the sort of toy blocks I played with as a kid"

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ILLUSTRATING GAMES

FREELANCER CHIARA VERCESI REVEALS HOW SHE USED PHOTOSHOP TO DESIGN A GAME WITH A PURPOSE

ABOUT THE ARTIST

CHIARA VERCESI
www.behance.net/chiaravercesi

Vercesi got her degree in illustration from the IED [Isituto Europe di Design] in Milan in 2006 and has been a freelancer ever since. A couple of years ago she moved to Amsterdam where she currently lives and works, using the city as a never-ending source of inspiration for her illustrations.

NAME OF PROJECT

STEAMPILOTS

Ever since graduating from the Istituto Europeo di Design in Milan in 2006, freelance illustrator Chiara Vercesi has had the career many Photoshop artists dream of. Currently living in Amsterdam, she has worked for several publishers as well as created art for international organisations such as Google, Facebook, Enel, and Bic, as well as collaborating with the research department at Philips as a graphic designer.

Her favourite projects over the years, however, have been working with universities on research projects involving traditional boardgames and digital games.

"I have worked for many years with Spartaco Albertarelli, a well known Italian game designer, who has been my thesis supervisor and taught me everything I know about the games world," Vercesi explains. "I met Fausto Dassenno through Spartaco Albertarelli." When Dassenno sent her an email asking if she'd be interested in working on Steampilots, a new game with a purpose (GWAP; a game designed to make processing information fun and rewarding) developed for Cubrik with Moonsubmarine, Vercesi was delighted. After her work with universities, developing illustrations for Steampilots was a natural transition – with its own new challenges to overcome.

WAS IT DIFFERENT TO DESIGN AN ILLUSTRATION FOR A GWAP AS OPPOSED TO A NORMAL GAME OR BOARD GAME?

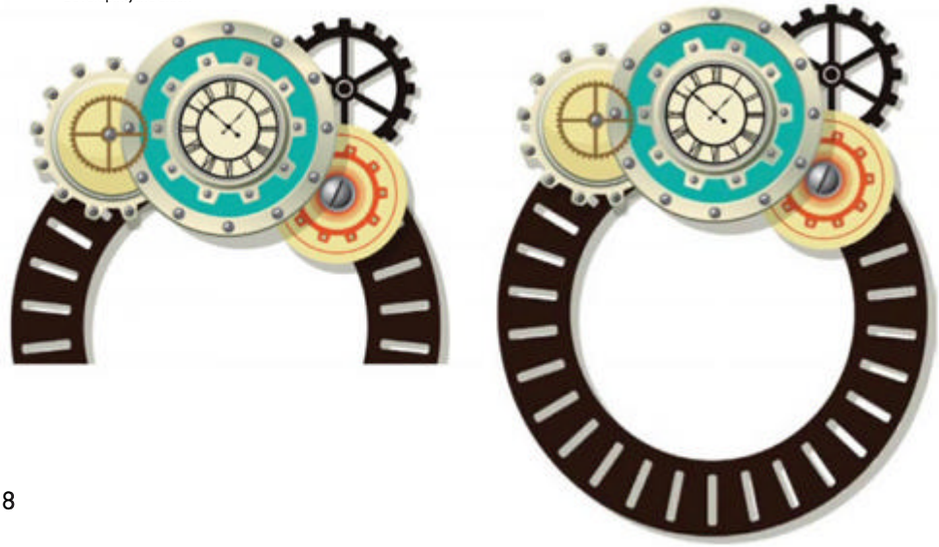
Yes, definitely. After three years this is still one of my favourite portfolio projects, because I was given the freedom to illustrate the scenario in my very own way, regardless of all the stereotypes and boundaries you have to keep in consideration when you are working on a traditional board game.

I had worked with an international research team of developers in two different universities, but since it was a research project, the client was more interested in the quality of the final product than in matching tight deadlines for the market.

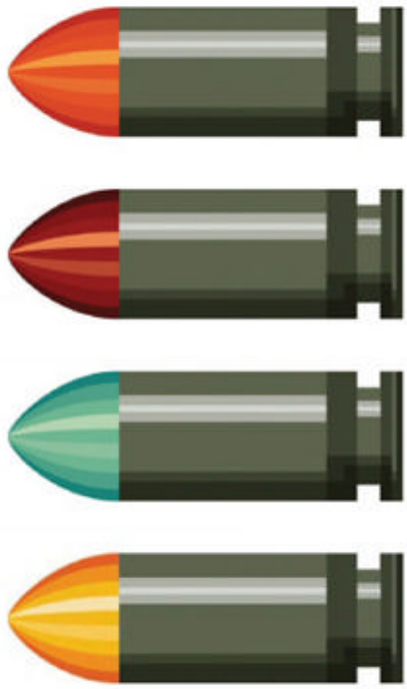
I hope all my colleagues have the chance to work on this type of project at least once, it has been really interesting: I had the chance to visit the IT laboratories in London, and to speak with some of the professors who were leading the team, to better understand the kind of project it was, and not just from an illustration point of view. To read a bit more about their research, and to find out what the purpose of a GWAP is, you can visit **www.cubrikproject.eu**.

Steampilots logo

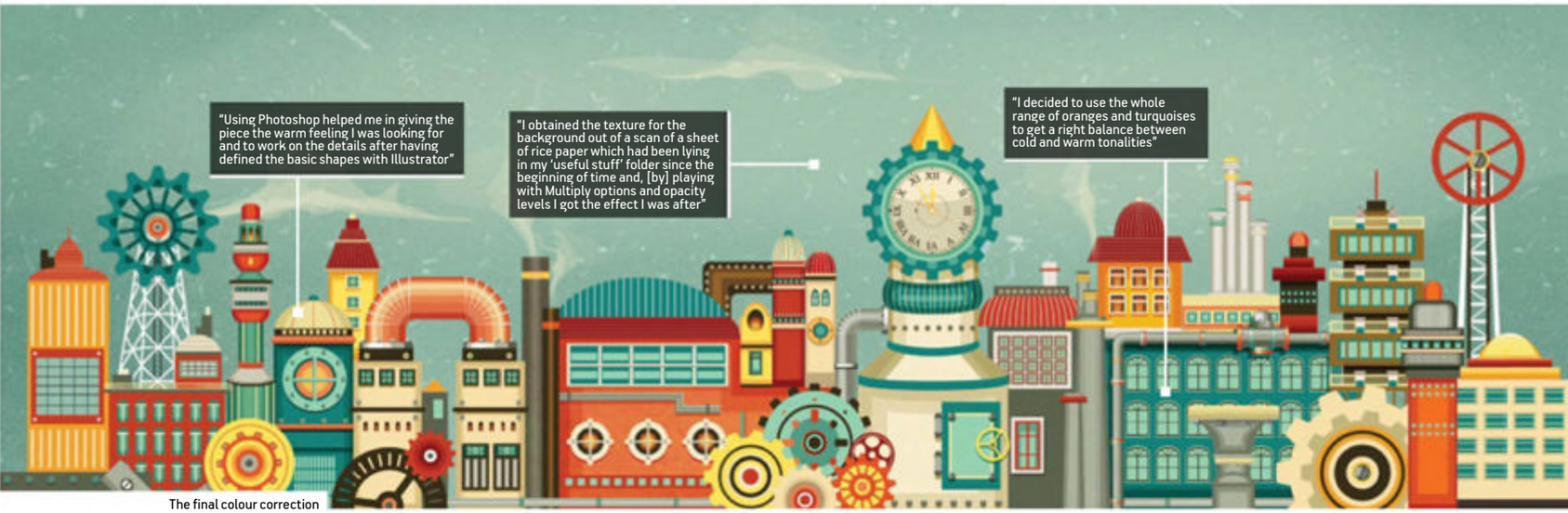
Developing the clock



Colourful bullets

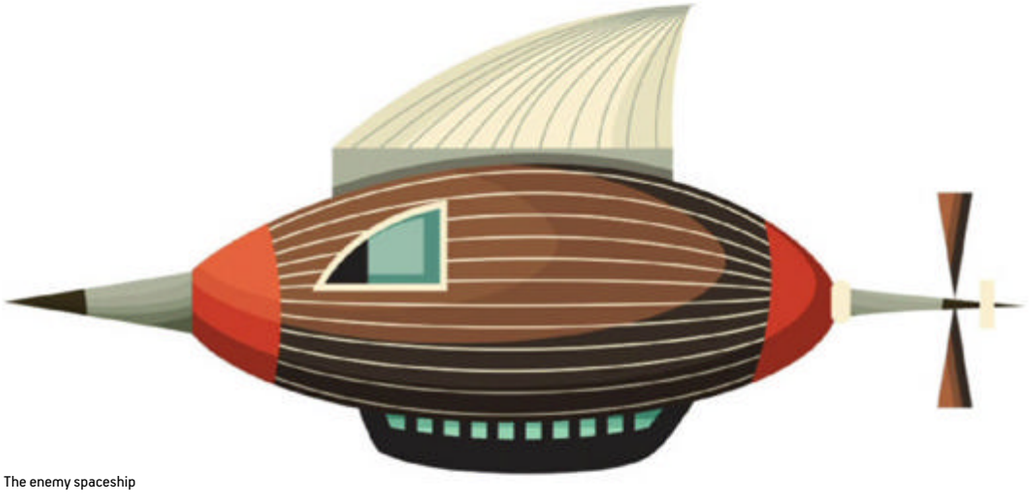


All images © Chiara Vercesi



The final colour correction

Work in progress



The enemy spaceship

HOW DID YOU DEVELOP THE CLEAN SHAPES AND LOOK OF THE DESIGN?

It was a very traditional workflow. I always start with pencil and paper, that is the only way I can make up my mind about an idea. Once the team had approved the sketch, I made a colour mood board and collected some paper textures.

The study of the colour palette was really important to give the image the playful mood I was looking for. I decided to use the whole range of oranges and turquoises to get the right balance between cold and warm tonalities: the turquoise is a less serious colour compared to blue and, as the orange was less intense than red, I found it a good combination. It was also a great palette when taking into account the fact that the user would have to look at it for quite a bit of time while playing the game so it had to be something not too tiring for the eyes.

Finally, I developed the basic shapes with Illustrator, exporting everything in Photoshop to add texture, adjust colours and polish the illustration.

The layer masks are really useful to apply textures and filters just on some parts of the illustration. The Noise filter helps a lot to warm up and give a more traditional look to vector illustrations.

WOULD YOU CONSIDER THE FINAL DESIGN A SUCCESS?

I am still happy with it, even if today I would maybe work it out in a different way. I have loved this project so, yes, it has been a success.

IF YOU COULD GIVE OUR READERS ONE PHOTOSHOP SECRET YOU'VE LEARNED OVER THE YEARS, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

Keep experimenting with functionality and combinations. There are a lot of unexplored possibilities; I keep on discovering new things every day and 50 per cent of the time it happens just by mistake. The rest of the time I try to find a faster or a better way to get the exact image I have in mind.

The internet is an infinite source of tutorials and manuals and there is always something new to find out. If you just sit on what you have learned in school you will be out of the market in few years.

On the other hand, a lot of effects and a good technique are not enough to make a good illustration and sometimes, showing off all your technical skills, over-polishing a piece, could actually be self-defeating. There are artworks that are amazingly done from a technical point of view, which nonetheless are not interesting at all, while sometimes, simpler illustrations are a more catchy way to communicate a message and are quickly published around the world. So, my secret for you could be to learn how to recognise when it's enough and use just what you need to get the desired result – you will not get any awards for having used all the available filters on a single image.

Draw every day, work hard, keep loving what you are doing, never forget to read, see and taste what's going on around you. Don't focus just on the illustration world, there are a lot of interesting people out there doing really crazy stuff, go and meet them – you will never regret it and you never know how it could end up.

CAN YOU TELL US MORE ABOUT WHERE YOU AIM TO BE FOR THE FUTURE – SAY IN FIVE YEAR'S TIME?

Wow, that's a good question. Now everything is running so fast and well that I did not really have the time to make plans for the future. I am in transition at the moment and I am living the present day by day, enjoying a particularly good moment of my life.

CREAM STUDIOS

WORKING FROM A WIDE OPEN STUDIO DESIGNED TO ENCOURAGE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN DIFFERENT DEPARTMENTS, CREAM STUDIOS CREATES DETAILED, REALISTIC DESIGNS FOR SOME OF THE WORLD'S BIGGEST BRANDS

Creativity and collaboration are key for this Australian 3D and retouching studio. Known for its high-end, photorealistic work and good communication with clients, it's no wonder that Cream Studios is going from strength to strength.

The studio was started 14 years ago and has grown over the years to a staff of 12 with a modest aim to be the best. Director and owner Steve York says: "Good work attracts great people and that's what's happening here now."

The studio itself is in Sydney and offers a wide open space that encourages communication between the different departments, as well as separate suites to sit with clients in a quieter environment. "People always comment when they walk into the studio that we're pretty lucky with the space we're in," says senior retoucher Lee Turner. "We've got lots of space and art on the walls; it's a really lovely environment to work in. The space means that it's easy to sit down at each other's desks when we're collaborating on a job. Everyone here has plenty of industry experience and they're very open to sharing information, so we often ask each other's opinion on a job – sometimes you need that fresh perspective."

The layout of the studio and the closeness of the team mean that it is easy to work together on projects to deliver quality results to clients, making the production process much smoother. "With the larger jobs now involving [both] CGI and retouching, it's important to brief [the two departments] together at the beginning of the job," explains York. "3D artists often drag a retoucher over to their screen for advice or to offer up different passes for a retoucher to either speed up the process or to give the retoucher more to work with. Daily WIPs between production managers on the jobs in progress also helps us plan for timings and what we are offering as drafts for the clients to approve. Having good production managers that know what's happening with a job always makes the client comfortable."

This collaborative effort sparks a lot of new and exciting creative ideas, so is the studio able to add its own unique style and input into briefs? Yes and no, says York. "Some photographers we collaborate with have a very good idea of what they're after and just want our team to put together an image seamlessly as laid out in the brief. Others are very happy and keen for us to contribute our own creative input. Our 3D work actually requires more personal input, as you are

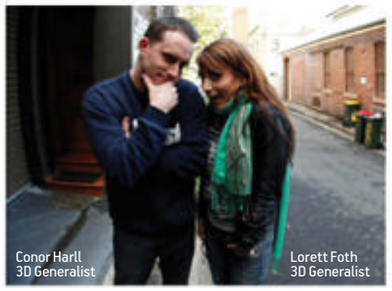
> "Everyone here has plenty of industry experience and they're very open to sharing information, so we often ask each other's opinion on a job"

ABOUT THE STUDIO

CREAM STUDIOS
www.creamstudios.com.au

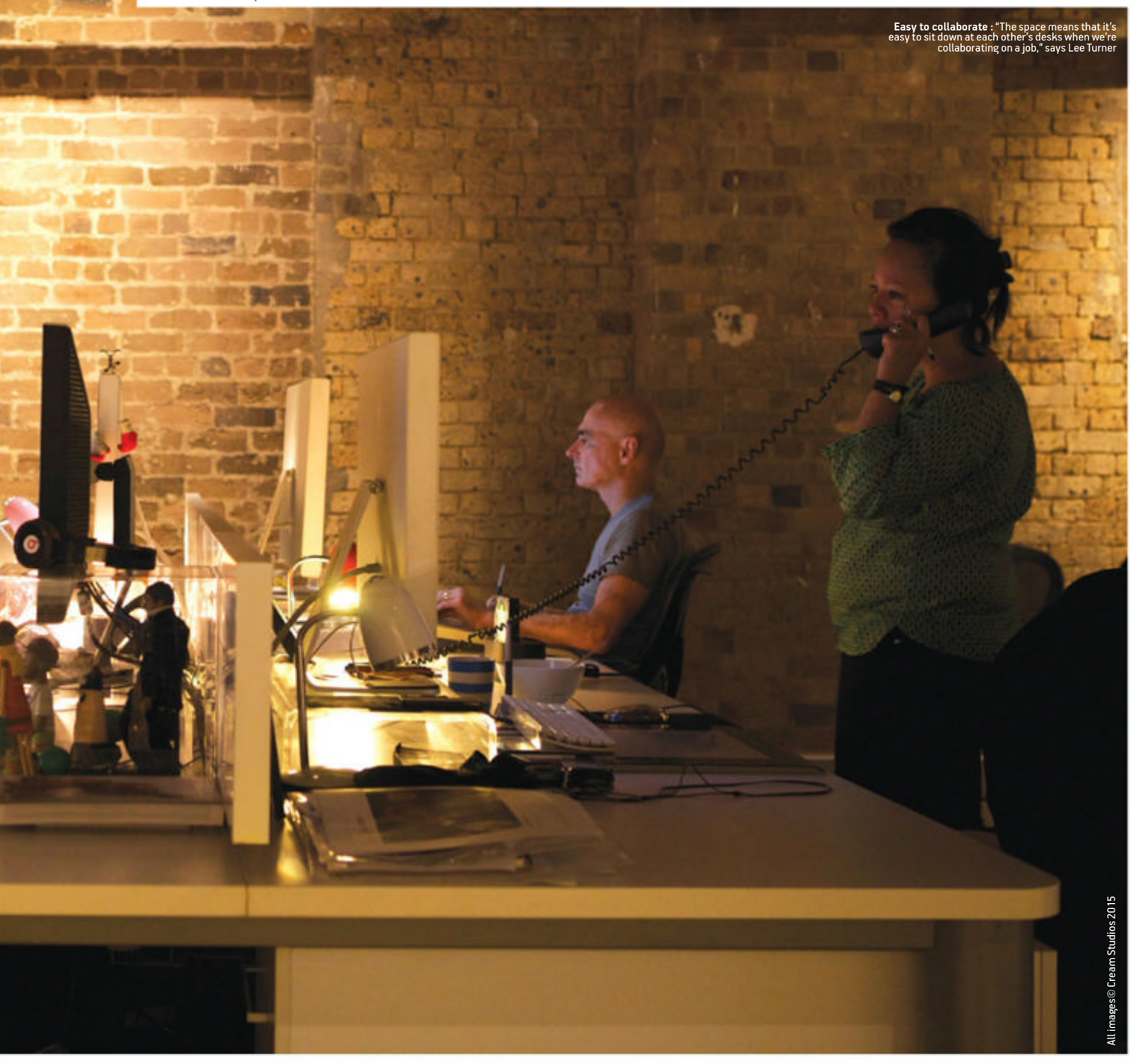
With an enviable reputation for high-end photographic retouching and 3D imaging, Cream has established itself as one of the industry's leading studios in Australia. The team of highly skilled and experienced artists work in tandem with art directors, designers and photographers alike, ensuring the step from concept to reality is as seamless as possible.

Steve York
Director/Owner


Conor Harll
3D Generalist

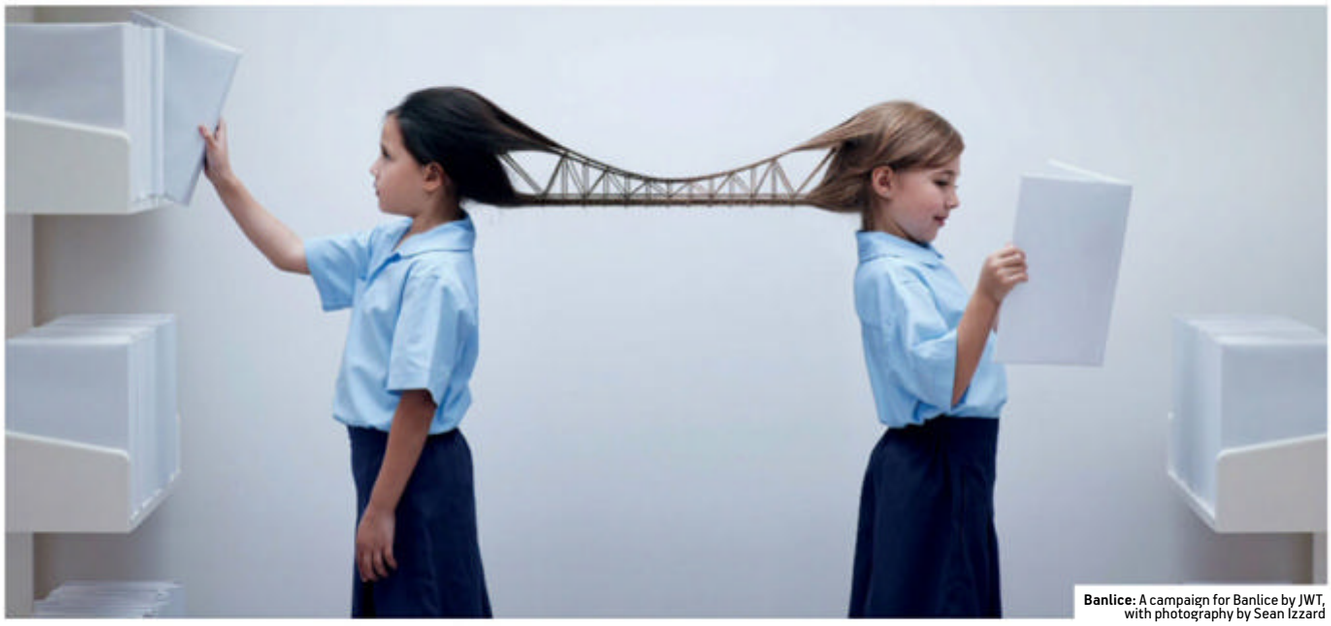
Lorett Foth
3D Generalist

Lee Turner
Senior Retoucher



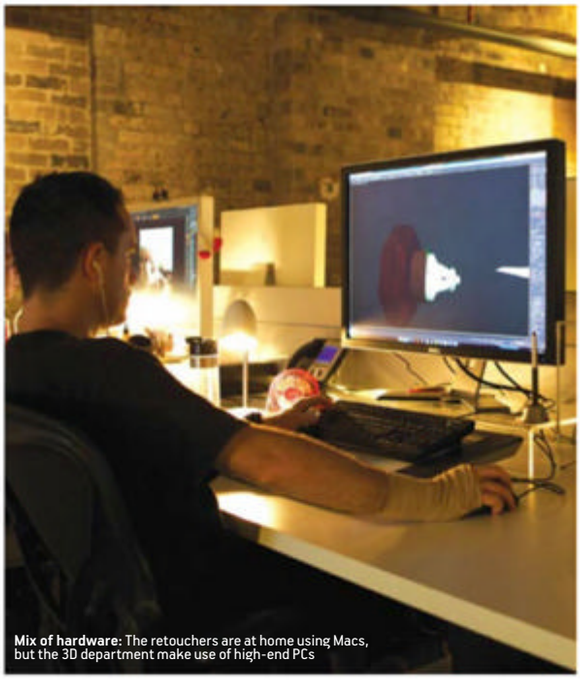
Easy to collaborate : "The space means that it's easy to sit down at each other's desks when we're collaborating on a job," says Lee Turner

All images© Cream Studios 2015



Banlice: A campaign for Banlice by JWT, with photography by Sean Izzard

Kirks Watermelonade: Working with a brilliant idea for Kirks, our 3D artists created the liquid, type, Chupa Chups and CGI characters, focusing on positioning and subtle detail



Mix of hardware: The retouchers are at home using Macs, but the 3D department make use of high-end PCs

working a bit like a photographer when directing the lighting and positioning of the elements throughout the image. An example of this can be seen in the Banlice image where we get to play with the hair and the structure of it to create the image. It isn't merely a prop that is shot and handed to us."

The kind of work that Cream Studios is producing requires a lot of experimentation with the latest technology, finding the right software programs to achieve the right results. The majority of its 3D work is created using a combination of Autodesk 3ds Max, Chaos Group V-Ray, Pixologic Zbrush and, of course, Photoshop. From here, they can use plug-ins and additional programs to tailor the workflow pipeline to suit needs, as Conor Harll, 3D generalist, explains: "Fortunately, in the CG world, there is a whole gamut of various programs and plug-ins designed to specifically ease the workflow of creating photorealistic images. Some of the more notable ones that we use regularly include Hair Farm, HDR Light Studio and the brilliant Itoo Software Forest Pack. Although V-Ray is our go-to renderer of choice, as technology evolves so do our needs and expectations of software. A perfect example of this is our use of rendering software Octane. Capable of extremely realistic renders, Octane Render is an unbiased GPU-powered rendering engine. While not quite there yet, I believe in time this could be an integral asset to our CG pipeline."

This flexibility and willingness to find and experiment with new programs was a key asset in a recent project for Banlice. 3D generalist Lorett Foth hadn't done hair before and this brief involved creating recognisable shapes out of hair. Not deterred by the challenge, Foth came up with a solution through trial and error: "I was looking into the 3D market to see what software was out there and I ended up trying four different hair programs. That meant sitting down and spending days on tutorials, software manuals and forums. I spent a long time trying to get the results I was looking for in Zbrush, I tried 3ds Max Hair and Fur, and then Ornatrix after. I finally ended up with Hair Farm, which was perfect for the job. After that it became easier, I could concentrate on getting the design of the gondolas and deciding on how the bridge construction could be woven out of hair. I really enjoy doing hair and I feel I can tackle any hair job now."

JACK DANIEL'S HONEY – BEES BEACH BAR

TO PROMOTE THE NEW JACK DANIEL'S TENNESSEE HONEY WHISKEY, A HOST OF MINIATURE 3D-MODELLED PEOPLE WERE POSITIONED TO LOOK LIKE A SWARM OF BEES ON A BOTTLE

01 | 3D WIREFRAME OF THE WHISKEY GLASS

To get the drops of condensation looking just right on the glass, we found that manually placing them created the most realistic result. For this we used 3ds Max's object paint. The glass, ice, liquid, lime and spritz were then brought into Octane Render where a sun-drenched HDR image helped achieve that late afternoon, warm summer mood.

02 | GREY RENDER OF POPULATED BOTTLE

Between the two final layouts, there were well over 5,000 miniature people placed on the bottles. We used Itoo Software's scattering plug-in, Forest Pack. Probably the most challenging part of this step was carefully adjusting the textures and positioning of the people, so that from a distance, they appeared to be a swarm of bees collecting around the bottle. Add to this some key characters and props (including the man himself, Jack Daniel) and the job was done.

03 | OCTANE BEAUTY RENDER OF JD BOTTLE

Being the real hero of this image, it was essential to get the look of the bottle spot on. After playing around with various lighting and shader setups within 3ds Max and V-Ray, we eventually achieved the desired result with the insanely powerful renderer, Octane. Ever-so subtle natural glass bumps and refraction helped with the overall realism of the Jack Daniel's bottle.

04 | BOTTLE V-RAY LABEL AND PEOPLE UNGRADED

The background started with a single portrait image, which was extended for landscape and then graded for a late afternoon feel. The bottle label was rendered in V-Ray and enhanced in Photoshop. A variety of passes were produced in V-Ray and layered up in Photoshop, including a grounding shadow, sun shadow and people reflections. They were all then graded to fit the scene.

Photoshop has a large role to play in the studio's output and there is a wealth of experience among the team members to get the best out of it. "Two of our retouchers have been using Photoshop since its early days, when we were working with scanned slides or negatives, and things that didn't exist had to be created by model makers," says Turner. Of course, times have moved on since then and Photoshop is often used alongside the 3D software that is so essential to this kind of work: "With the advent of 3D, the nature of creating advertising images is changing. Now, as a retoucher, every day is different. Sometimes we're manipulating a pure Photoshop image created with photographed or sourced images. Even though our 3D department is capable of creating miracles, the images always pass through the retouching department. Sometimes it's a collaborative effort, with ideas or different passes bouncing back and forth; sometimes it's just a tiny bit of polishing, adding a touch more photographic reality to a 3D model. As Photoshop continues to change, so do the number of ways to play with an image."

A recent project, and one that stands out for Conor Harll, shows another side to the studio. As well as manipulating images and creating high-end, technologically capable 3D designs, it also contributes to projects with a different kind of reward: "Recently, we were lucky enough to team up with Leo Burnett Sydney and the World Wildlife Fund Australia, to create an entire CG image to promote the upcoming Earth Hour campaign. Due to the sheer amount of computer-generated geometry in the scene, my hands were certainly full trying to keep the render times reasonable, while maintaining a photorealistic render. 3ds Max and V-Ray were the tools of choice to create this image, along with plenty of Forest Pack to scatter realistic foliage on the parched farm landscape. V-Ray's Lens Effects were used to finish off the bloom on the globe's filament. It was a super-challenging yet incredibly rewarding project to work on, for such a worthy cause."

Audi TT: Audi TT campaign, retouched by the team at Cream Studios

> "Even though our 3D department is capable of creating miracles, the images always pass through the retouching department... As Photoshop continues to change, so do the number of ways to play with an image"

A social conscience goes hand in hand with a good work ethic, which comes across in the way that Cream Studios works with its clients. It is important to the team that they don't let their clients down, and that they stick to whatever they quote for a job. This bodes well for the future of the studio; Steve York hopes to break down barriers in the US market, believing that they can offer some real benefits: "American agencies produce some great work with flexible budgets, which would allow for Cream to spread its creative wings even further and achieve some great work on an even larger scale. Also, the time difference actually works to their advantage: while they sleep we can be working on the job, so it's ready for review when they wake up in the morning. I really believe that Cream's skill level has the potential to meet the market's expectations and more." We can't wait to see this studio expand even further.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF STEVE YORK

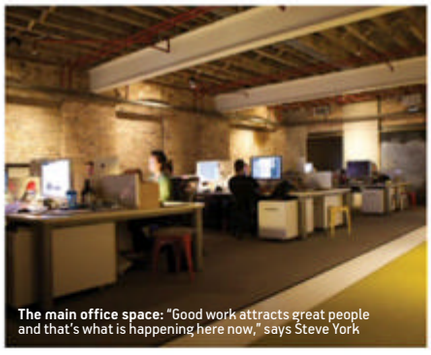
WE FIND OUT WHAT A DAY IS LIKE FOR THE DIRECTOR OF CREAM STUDIOS

09:00 | **MORNING WIP**
WIP Meeting between production and sales to discuss new and existing jobs, who would be the best to operate that job at the time and to make sure we're all on the same page.

10:00 | **CLIENT MEETING**
Meetings with photographers and/or art directors are usually scheduled for around this time. We usually set up in one of the suites and discuss the job at hand with one of the operators.

13:00 | **BREAK TIME**
Lunchtime! If I'm lucky I get to go out and have a bite, or it's one at the desk!

> I really believe that Cream's skill level has the potential to meet the market's expectations and more



The main office space: "Good work attracts great people and that's what is happening here now," says Steve York

Earth Hour: A beautiful collaboration with Leo Burnett for a very worthy cause, WWF's Earth Hour campaign. Built 100 per cent in 3D by CreamStudios

TOP 5 PRODUCTION TIPS

■ IMAGE LIBRARY
Always keep an eye out for great images or textures that are difficult to replicate. Nature is random, and computer-generated material is rarely random enough to look real.

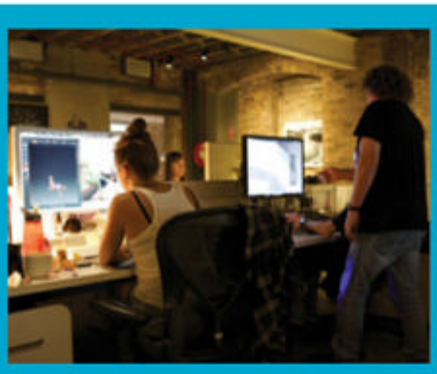
■ REFERENCE
Take the time to think and research at the start of each project and pay attention to detail. An abundance of reference material from the get-go can often save a lot of headaches down the line, and create a better final image.

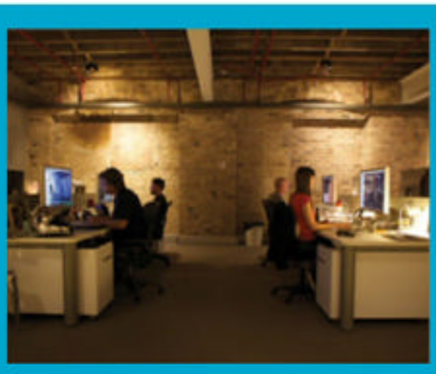
■ GET OUTSIDE
If possible, take advantage of a break at some point during the day to get outside and readjust your eyes. Constantly staring at pixels for hours on end can really have a negative effect on productivity, as well as creativity.

■ KEEP IT REAL
It's very difficult to fool the eye; you've got years' worth of images stored in your head as reference. Sometimes the best way to create torn paper is to go and shoot some torn paper.

■ FILE ORGANISATION
Always try to organise your files with others in mind. If someone else (more often a client these days) needs your layered file, a complicated layering or non-existent naming system helps no one. Delete nothing.

Allen's Snakes Alive: A great campaign by JWT for Allen's Snakes Alive, made completely in 3D. Our CGI artists focused on giving the snake some nice detail on the scales and, of course, a little bit of character





All images: © Cream Studio 2015

14:00 | PROGRESSION CHECK
After lunch, I check in with the team and see how they're progressing with their work. We discuss any questions or problems they may be facing and problem-solve together.

15:00 | ALL SYSTEMS SET TO GO
Everyone is back from lunch and we are banging out our work to get some WIPs to the client before the end of the day in time for review and hopefully feedback in the morning.

17:00 | AFTERNOON DEBRIEF
Working out what needs to be done this evening to get it off to the client in the morning. Still getting jobs walking through the door at this time!

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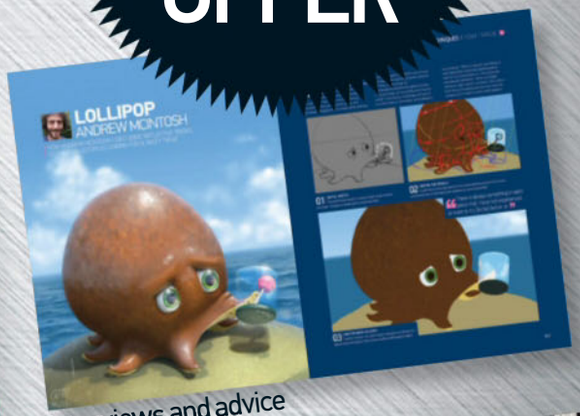

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PRO TYPE TECHNIQUES

EXPERTS REVEAL HOW TO MASTER PHOTOSHOP'S TYPE TOOLS AND EXPLAIN HOW YOU CAN CREATE TYPOGRAPHIC DESIGNS LIKE A PROFESSIONAL

Typography swirls with words, leaps with letters and dazzles with definitions, while it's something that all graphic designers, motion designers, comic book artists, and illustrators – indeed anyone who uses a computer – has to tackle at some point, it's also an area in which you can specialise to an incredible degree. You can be a type designer, creating the fonts for the rest of us to use, you can be a typographer, wrangling and laying out those typefaces, or you can be a lettering artist, creating the individual letterforms and words needed for specific illustrations.

Indeed there is so much terminology that even design-literate folk can get it wrong. Seth Mach points out that, for instance, "A typeface has come to mean the style and design of visual aspects of an alphabet and specific letterforms. A font refers to categorisation of aspects of the specific weight (book, bold, black), size (points) and style (condensed, extended, oblique) of a typeface." Essentially, "a font is the delivery method of a typeface in a specific weight and style in the digital file format."

Once you have the basics fixed in your mind then you can start to get excited about the possibilities that text offers. Remember, leading is the amount of space between lines of text, tracking is the space between groups of characters, and kerning is the amount of space between two particular characters. For Charles Williams, part of the fun is that he has "a more brief-centric open-minded stylistic approach [to type projects] than I do with pure illustration. This is because typography briefs require the type to respond creatively to the specific messaging of

© Alexander Klement

36 Days of Type A: 3D Days of Type is "a fun project" of Alexander Klement's, "where every day a new letterform needs to be designed. It's great for keeping creativity flowing in a short turnaround and working as quickly as possible, helping to build many core skills used as a graphic designer"

© Linzie Hunter

For Every New Thing: "During the month of January," explains Linzie Hunter, "I put a shout-out on social media for people to share their New Year's resolutions with me. Each day I would pick one and create an image inspired by the words and the sentiment behind each goal. I combined lettering with illustration"

MEET THE EXPERTS

STEVE SIMPSON
HTTP://STEVESIMPSON.PROSITE.COM/
@STEVESIMPSON
Steve Simpson has 30 years of award-winning graphic design, illustration and typography under his belt, with clients including Vodafone, Absolut and the Wall Street Journal.

LINZIE HUNTER
WWW.LINZIEHUNTER.CO.UK
@LINZIEHUNTER
Linzie Hunter studied illustration at Chelsea College of Art and Design. She is a hand-lettering artist, whose work is created digitally, but she also enjoys traditional print-making.

ALEXANDER KLEMENT
WWW.ALEXANDER-KLEMENT.COM
@ALEXPKLEMENT
A graphic designer at 999 Design, Alexander Klement "loves working with type to create interesting graphic solutions," and is pleased his current role has a varied client base so he can keep developing his typographic skills.

ANASTASIA STANKEVICH
WWW.ANKASTANILLUSTRATION.COM
@ANKASTANART
Freelance artist and illustrator Anastasia Stankevich mixes traditional and digital techniques in her work, and takes much of her inspiration from nature.

ANDY HAU
WWW.ANDYHAU.COM
@ANDYKWHAU
Andy Hau is the creative force behind A.H.A. Design Ltd, a design studio that insists on being multi-disciplinary. Nevertheless, typography is one his key skills.

BART VAN DELFT
WWW.WEB-FARM.NL
@BARTVANDELFT
The work of Dutch graphic designer Bart van Delft spans a range of media, but typography is a particular interest of his. He describes himself as a minimalist when it comes to type.

JANELLE CUMMINS
WWW.JANELLECUMMINS.COM
Motion graphics designer Janelle Cummins recently graduated from Savannah College of Art and Design, and is currently based in California.

MARTIN SCHMETZER
WWW.MARTINSCHMETZER.COM
@MARTINSCHMETZER
An illustrator who focuses on hand-drawn lettering, Martin Schmetzer lives and works in Stockholm.

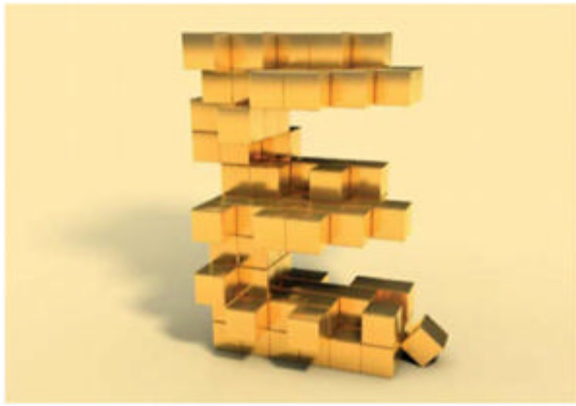
MURILO LOPES
WWW.BEHANCE.NET/MURILOLOPES
Art director and motion graphics designer Murilo Lopes is a freelancer working out of Sao Paulo, Brazil.

SETH MACH
WWW.SETHMACH.COM
@SETH_MACH
Seth Mach is a visual designer and artist based in San Francisco. He received his M.F.A. degree from the Savannah College of Art and Design.

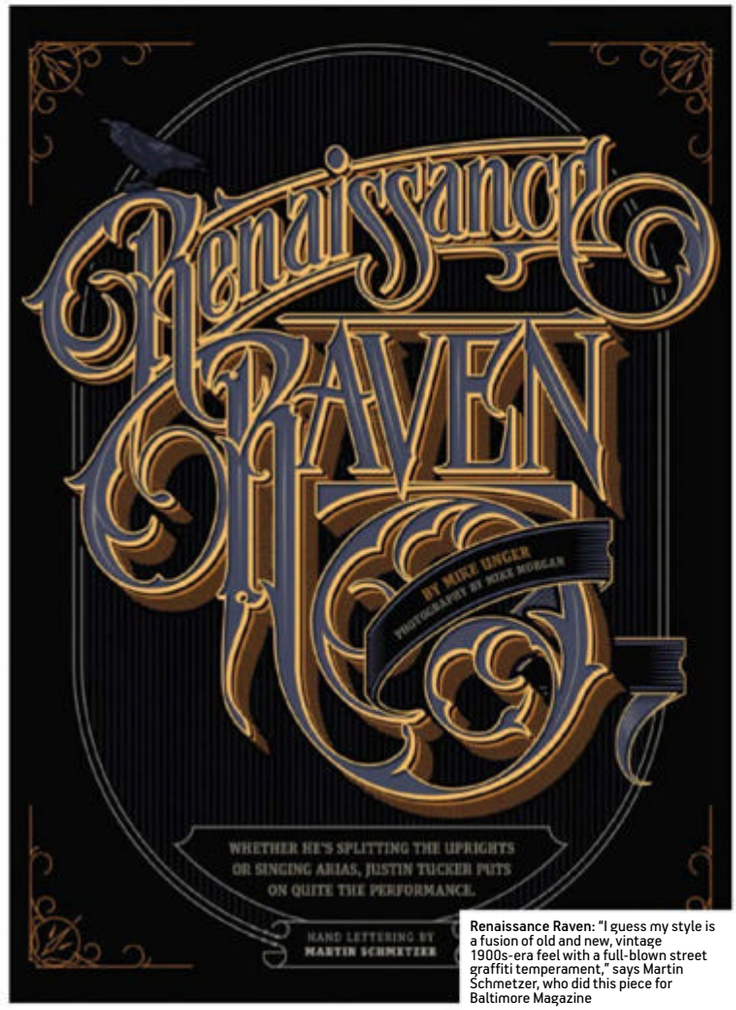
CHARLES WILLIAMS
WWW.MADEUP.ORG
@THISISMADEUP
Made Up is the name of Charles Williams' London-based illustration and type studio. He has worked for clients like Adobe, Google and Nike.

BRANDON NICKERSON
WWW.BNICKS.COM
Brandon Nickerson is a designer from Florida, who now lives and works in New York. He is passionate about using his skills to build brands.

© Anastasia Stankevich



© Alexander Klement



© Martin Schmetzer

Renaissance Raven: "I guess my style is a fusion of old and new, vintage 1900s-era feel with a full-blown street graffiti temperament," says Martin Schmetzer, who did this piece for Baltimore Magazine

what's being said, whereas illustration requires a consistency of style to be applied to different subject matter, so that the work is recognisably that of the mercantile-minded illustrator."

As Andy Hau puts it, "lettering and typography need to convey a deeper level of meaning that isn't expressed in the words. All design needs to have a story and a concept – it's what makes the product interesting, engaging, resonant and ultimately, sincere."

They say a picture speaks a thousand words, and in effect, the typographer is providing the picture for those words. Different typefaces, sizes, weights and so on, all impact on the message and meaning that the text itself conveys. For Anastasia Stankevich, that means using "ornamental and decorative typefaces, something that has concept and detail as it's close to what I like to create." To create the letters for her piece SPRING, she "used plants, flowers, butterflies and birds to create and decorate the letters, with more light and pastel colours to complement the 'fresh' spring look. The LOVE illustration called for a romantic feeling so I combined roses with delicate evening colours."

Mood and meaning have to be at the fore of your mind in advertising work. Brandon Nickerson explains that, if he's "creating packaging for a shaving brand, I'm most likely going to use a clean legible font (to play off of the clean and crisp look you have after shaving) that has some sort of approachable aspect to it (to play off of the fact that you are putting a razor to your face and throat, so you don't want to come off too edgy). What helps is breaking down whatever it is you are trying to say and play off of those certain aspects that stick out." Nickerson says that your type design is "creating the visual voice of the brand." This requires serious thought, only "don't think too hard or you'll overthink it."

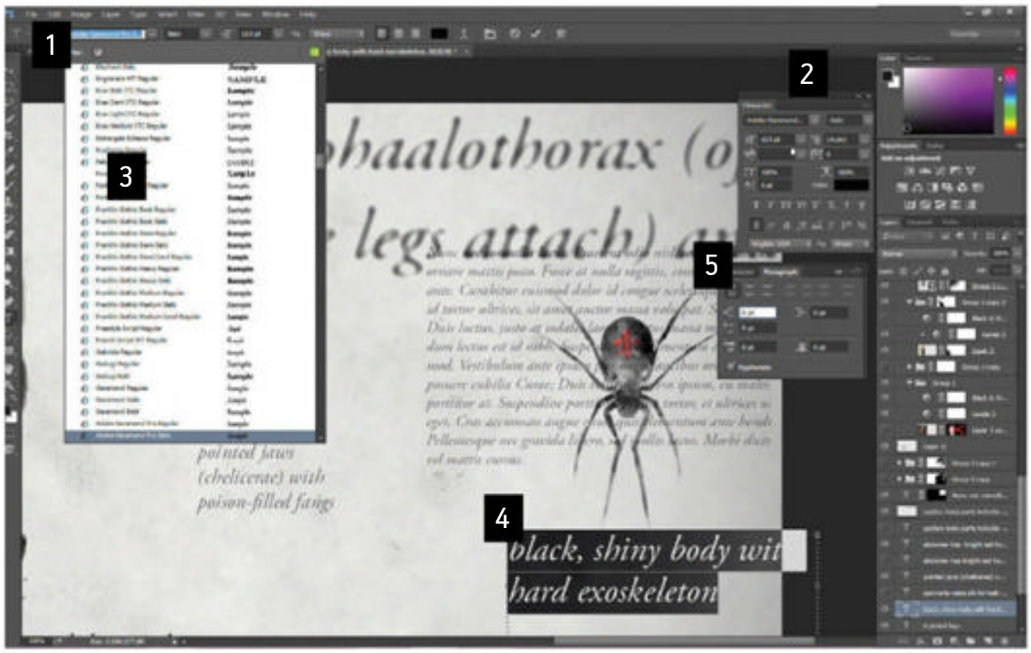
© Linzie Hunter

© Anastasia Stankevich

SPRING: Anastasia Stankevich likes "the idea of using type as an illustration in and of itself and being able to create a visual message with both the word and the imagery"

© Martin Schmetzer

PHOTOSHOP TOOLS FOR TYPE



1 First things first: Once you've chosen the basic Horizontal or Vertical Type tool, the basic settings can be tweaked from here. You can change font, point size, or turn your text 3D

2 Give your work character: From the Character panel you have more control over your text, and can manage tracking, leading, kerning and so on

3 Fountain of fonts: Which font to use is obviously critical. Janelle Cummins says her "favourite fonts tend to be those with large font families. Because of the variety of line weights, styles and condensations, I am able to use only one typeface. This creates unity."

4 Layer it up: Text is created on separate layers so you can manage it and apply different effects. If your client is yet to supply you with all the words they want, you can create Placeholder Text from the main Type menu

5 Chunks of text: Manage how your text is broken up and displayed in the Paragraph panel. Here you have your alignment and justification options, and you can choose whether to hyphenate or not

Typography can seem very technical. There are rules laid down to ensure legibility and readability, and you may feel your creativity stifled. "Skilled typographers," says Mach, "spend thousands of hours with letterforms and have studied their historical metamorphosis and public use. There are rules that have been decided upon. Although it could be argued that typography is subjective, some aspects have to be intrinsically correct. This is the separation of design and art. Yet, it is clear that typography changes as human need changes. A good example is that insular and blackletter scripts are no longer used in modern books."

Indeed, these days, Murilo Lopes says that you can often see "more clean styles, less gradients, less information. The principal rules that I use is alignment and colour combination. And readability! For example, an image with much information behind the text, with many colours and contrast does not help the readability." A common mistake that Janelle Cummins spots is "too little leading and tracking," or "the unnecessary use of multiple typefaces [that] hardly relate to the message of the piece. In general, no more than two or three typefaces should be used at one time and should aim at enhancing the meaning of the words."

"Novice designers often make type too big," says Mach. "Of course you have to design for specific situations and people, but when I am struggling with a text layout, it nearly always comes down to my tracking being too tight and type size being too large. Trained typographers use size, tracking, weight and careful typeface selection to convey meaning and mood. These are reasons why letters and alphabets have won out over pictograms and symbols to describe complex ideas in the modern world."

When he was learning, Martin Schmetzer used graffiti "to explore the alphabet and learn how the letters are put together. You don't have to follow strict traditional typographic guides and can twist and bend the letters until you tame them into your own. Make each letter look different in unlimited ways. In fact, I try not to have guides or rules in consideration when I design, other than legibility and the aim to create something visually appealing."

Often, the typographer will push the latter, while the client may want to play safe with the former. In this regard, van Delft mentions "the wish of the client to use comic-style fonts for headings or body-text. I am glad when I can convince them not to go for something

LEGIBILITY VERSUS READABILITY

THEY SOUND LIKE THEY MEAN THE SAME THING, BUT TYPOGRAPHERS HAVE TO JUGGLE BOTH CONCERNS

Essentially, legibility is how easy it is to distinguish an individual letter form, while readability is about how easy it is to read and understand the text. The former depends on large X-heights and large counters and occurs when "the designer deeply understands human perception and language, including the end purpose of the typeface," as Seth Mach put it, while the latter is about point size, line length and letter spacing. Mach adds: "Readability is obviously how easily a typeface is able to be read, but a lot of decisions go into that design such as point size, line lengths, tracking, leading and type alignment, among other factors like the background contrast. All these can affect the way people perceive letterforms and words."

"As a typographer," Bart van Delft adds, "it's sometimes tempting to choose a beautiful thin font for headings. Not all clients can see the beauty of lean lettering and prefer readability over design. So try to search for a legible but still attractive typeface."

> Novice designers often make type too big. Of course you have to design for specific situations and people, but when I am struggling with a text layout, it nearly always comes down to my tracking being too tight and type size being too large

SETH MACH / **WWW.SETHMACH.COM**

© Steve Simpson

Raglan Road: "My choice of lettering style is dependent on the overall feel of the piece I'm working on," says Steve Simpson. "I sometimes mix in a few different styles depending on the effect I want to get. It's similar to drawing features on a face; it's all about the expression"

© Seth Mach

Stillis: "The best typefaces do not really convey a meaning," says Seth Mach, "but more of a singular feeling because of its structure. It is the graphic designer who ends up using the finished typeface to take on the job of creating a mood and meaning through type size, hierarchy and layout"

KERN A FONT IN PHOTOSHOP

LOOK AT SHAPES AND FORM, NOT JUST LETTERS, ADVISES SETH MACH, WHO EXPLAINS THAT KERNING IS ABOUT RHYTHM AND IS RARELY CORRECT IF LETTERS ARE EVENLY SPACED

01 CHOOSE YOUR WEAPON

Although bitmap images are "not the most conducive to viewing or editing letterforms", as Mach puts it, there are times when you'll have to type directly and kern in Photoshop. "Select the Horizontal Type tool (T) and hover over a spot where the letter-spacing looks optically incorrect. Click between the letters. There should be a blinking cursor. Here the space between the P and H is too tight, while the space between the T and the O is too loose."

02 EDIT AWAY

"Hold down the Alt/Opt key and use the left and right arrow keys to nudge the letters together or apart. The left arrow key decreases spacing and the right arrow key increases spacing." Mach also suggests you "Track out the type a bit. A little secret is that more letter-spacing overall hides kerning mistakes between specific letters. Because the human eye recognises relationships between forms, letting each letter breathe can save time and look better in the end. But be careful of this practice with body copy."

03 EVALUATE YOUR WORDS

"To exit out of the Type tool, press Esc and then V to get back to the Move tool. After kerning, the type may have to be realigned in the design due to shifting. Lastly, read the words again. It is easy to be so focused on the technical aspects of kerning that misspellings can slip through."

© Janelle Cummins

Running Squirrel: Janelle Cummins agrees that typography is full of rules, saying "but because I have a better understanding of these rules, I am able to choose when to use them and when to break them"

childish. Something annoying which every designer will understand is when a client would like to switch the copy of your typography masterpiece. When you finally have created your beautiful heading and the client changes the text you can basically start all over again. So I verify the text a few times before I start and explain the consequences of an alteration to the client."

But you shouldn't feel battered by the twin cudgels of readability and legibility. For, as van Delft continues, "the basic principles of typography still exist, but they have faded a little. The fonts we use nowadays are a bit more exciting than they used to be, but strange kerning or goofy fonts as body text are still a no go." For Steve Simpson, it's like any skill, "you need to learn the rules before you can choose which ones to work with and which ones to discard. I think it's the same with illustration, there are certain things you always do and certain things you never do. These make your work look a particular way and give it a style."

Beginning to feel confident in your own style is the one of the things that establishes an artist. And when you do, you can really start testing the technical rules, pushing the boundaries of legibility, and even getting down and dirty with the letterforms themselves.

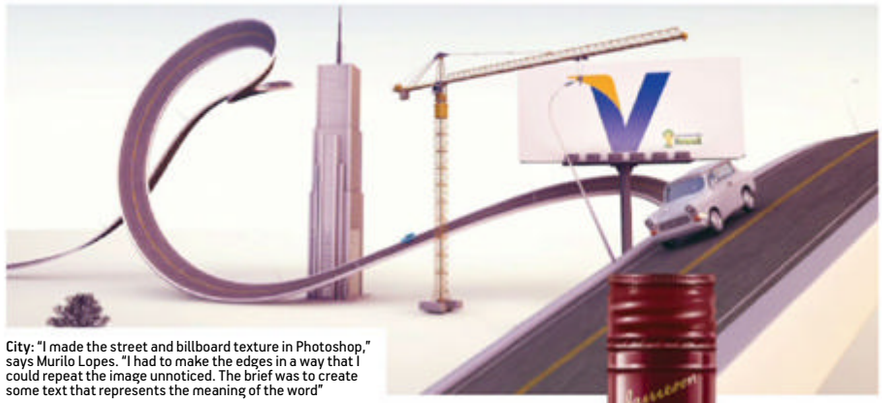
DESIGN YOUR OWN LETTERING

If you can't find the font that fits perfectly, then why not edit one so that it does? Nickerson often chooses a font that he thinks has "a complementary base (and what I mean by base is the foundation and overall traits such as the contrast from thick to thin, unique characteristics and so on) to what look and feel I'm trying to accomplish. From there I honestly just mess around, sometimes I try connecting certain aspects of the font to others (almost like weird ligatures), sometimes I overlap the letters; this is basically just having fun with the type and letting my imagination go wild."

Or you can go further and simply create your own letters. "A big trend right now is hand-drawn typography," says Schmetzer. "The craftsmanship behind typography is almost as important right now as the final result it seems. This is a trend that covers more areas than typography, people appreciate the crafts behind a product or design, so there's a story behind hand-crafted shoes or the good cup of well roasted coffee. It's popular when the design looks vintage and well-worn, even if it's an effect made in retrospect in Photoshop."

This certainly appeals to Stankevich. "Since my focus is on hand-drawn," she says, "I like the fact that I can see more and more of this style being used and appreciated. I live in London and there has been a rising interest for bespoke and hand-painted signs, for example, with many designers turning to using these more traditional techniques. I think that's great, though I personally prefer a good balance between traditional and digital."

Simpson didn't come to illustrating his own letters until quite late in his career. He says, "As an illustration-focused designer I would be working mainly with text for titles and headings rather than body copy. I found picking fonts very frustrating (but heaps better than using letterset catalogues), it always seemed to be a case of the font wasn't exactly what I wanted but I'd spent far too long searching for the right one... So it would just have to do. Soon I realised I could change and adapt letter forms (and that it was actually okay to do this), this made my work look so much more cohesive. I guess the eureka moment for me was when I realised that by hand drawing my own letter forms they perfectly matched my illustration and that it worked so well because it was my hand that had both illustrated the image and illustrated the text – it



City: "I made the street and billboard texture in Photoshop," says Murilo Lopes. "I had to make the edges in a way that I could repeat the image unnoticed. The brief was to create some text that represents the meaning of the word"

© Murilo Lopes

CASE STUDY: JAMESON IRISH WHISKEY DESIGN

STEVE SIMPSON BROUGHT HIS HAND-LETTERED APPROACH TO PACKAGING FOR JAMESON

"One of my most recent projects is a limited edition label for Jameson Irish Whiskey," says Simpson. "It uses a lot of hand lettering and icons. The whole label was created in Photoshop CC. I use the Pen tool to create my shapes. Some of these get rasterized so I can add texture others are left as shapes and exported to Illustrator if foils or embossing are required. I didn't use any fonts, deciding to re-create the Jameson branding so it's ever so slightly quirky."

That style is mainly "on the fun and quirky side," as Simpson puts it. "Standard letter spacing and uniformity is less important than if I was dealing with more serious subjects. I like the way letters can reach under, over or even through other letters. My feeling is every letter should have its own space depending on the letters on either side of it. I'm not sure any app can do that yet."

Hand lettering is a big part of Simpson's arsenal, and in the design world at large, he really believes that "hand lettering is back in a big way. In design there's a definite move towards a more authentic, analogue, less digital feel and hand lettering is certainly part of that."

© Steven Simpson

© Andy Hau

"Sometimes," Andy Hau says, "legibility and readability take a back seat and you let the emotive qualities of the text wash over the viewer first. Even with the most cursive of lettering and typefaces, you can maintain readability by treating the letters as a composition to ensure that the flow of words is natural and easy"

> "I guess the eureka moment for me was when I realised that by hand drawing my own letter forms they perfectly matched my illustration and that it worked so well because it was my hand that had both illustrated the image and illustrated the text – it became one big illustration"
>
> STEVE SIMPSON / **HTTP://STEVESIMPSON.PROSITE.COM/**

became one big illustration. I was hugely inspired by David Klein's TWA posters, especially that cohesive feeling of wholeness he manages to get between his lettering, illustration and colour."

Linzie Hunter, who describes herself as a hand-lettering artist, is also interested in cohesion: "The letters I draw only exist to be placed next to the letter beside it. The advantages are that I only ever have to worry about creating the characters in the word or phrase I'm working on and not a full typeface. As a hand-letterer I have greater flexibility and freedom when it comes to creating letters and I'd say, an easier job on the whole. For me it's a less technical approach. I use my instincts to decide on placement, spacing and decoration. I rely solely on what looks or feels right to me and I don't measure anything out. Talk to me about leading or kerning and my eyes quickly glaze over and I'm soon out of my depth. When I visualise how a piece of custom lettering might look, I'm usually seeing each letter as an individual illustrated or graphic element – each of these complement each other and combine together to *hopefully* create a cohesive illustration."

Hand-lettering is just as popular in the world of motion graphics, with Cummins explaining that "designers are embracing the imperfections these produce. These types of fonts provide a more personal touch which is sometimes lost by traditional computer fonts. Another trend is the use of installation and environmental typography where creatives use physical objects and materials to create letterforms. This also succeeds at humanising the message of a piece."

TOP 10 FONTS

OUR EXPERTS REVEAL THEIR FAVOURITE TYPEFACES AND WHAT MAKES THEM STAND OUT

1. GOTHAM
www.typography.com/fonts/gotham/overview/
$199 (Gotham 1-8 styles, for 1 computer)

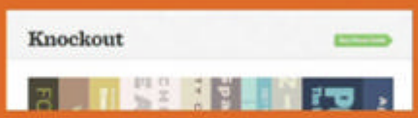
A modern classic, Gotham is perfect for headlines. Seth Mach explains that the 2000 font was based on "signage and architecture from the Thirties and Forties," and "still feels uniquely contemporary with its proportions and powerful geometric structures."

2. FUTURA MAXI
www.fonts.com/font/monotype/futura-maxi
£108 (4 font family)

There any many different versions of Futura out there, but Maxi "has such a nice balance between being approachable yet established," says Brandon Nickerson. "It's clean, legible, unique and not as commonly used, which is always a plus."

3. FELL TYPE
http://iginomarini.com/fell/the-revival-fonts/
Donation

Typefaces from the time of the Reformation have been brought back in digitized form, and are remarkable in their power. "I like revival fonts," says Steve Simpson, "It's the imperfections from their original reproduction methods that gives them a warmth for me, in much the same way I like the sound of vinyl over MP3s."



4. KNOCKOUT
www.typography.com/fonts/knockout/styles/
$169 (5 styles, 1 computer)

"Such a great font with an abundance of diversity," says Brandon Nickerson. "Each weight not only gets bolder but expands in width while keeping proportions consistent. Knockout is also one of those fonts you don't hear much about."

5. AVENIR
www.linotype.com/72/Avenir-family.html
£108 (4 typefaces)

Another classic, Seth Mach calls it "one of the best typefaces I have found to complement Gotham. It is also san-serif and a good alternative to common serif typefaces for body copy."

6. UNIVERS
www.fontshop.com/families/univers
£39 (1 style)

Univers was a ground-breaking sans-serif achievement when Adrian Frutiger designed it for the Deberny & Piegnot Foundry in 1957. Now it's the designer's secret weapon for establishing a steady, even tone.

7. DOVES TYPE
www.typespec.co.uk/doves-type/
£40

Not only is this a digitised version of an old typeface (punchcutter Edward Prince's single-sized 16pt type from the turn of the 20th Century), but Robert Green had to rescue the metal letters from the Thames to re-make it, after Thomas James Cobden Sanderson dumped them when fighting over ownership with Emery Walker.

8. ROCKWELL
www.fontshop.com/families/rockwell/
£30 (1 style)

This strong, slab serif font from the Monotype Design Studio first appeared in 1934, and remains popular to this day.

9. NEUE HAAS UNICA
www.monotype.com/libraries/neue-haas-unica/
£42

Everyone knows Helvetica, but not everyone knows Haas Unica, which was designed to be its replacement but was forgotten when the company behind it had financial difficulties. Now, it's back, remade for the digital age.

10. COMIC SANS
http://fontsgeek.com/fonts/Comic-Sans-MS-Regular
Free

Probably the most mocked and reviled font in existence, Comic Sans has a surprisingly cool history, having been "based on hand lettering from the graphic novels The Dark Knight Returns (lettered by John Costanza) and Watchmen (lettered by Dave Gibbons)" says Steve Simpson. It's also supposed to be easier for dyslexic readers to understand.

ENHANCE TYPE IN PHOTOSHOP

Of course, it's one thing to design a few letters and illustrate or animate one example of them being used, it's quite another to design a whole font of your own. Indeed, "Designing a typeface is perhaps the most difficult process in all of graphic design," says Mach. "A typeface has to be close to perfect, which can take months or years to finish. The eye for detail gets better with experience as well, so there is a constant revisiting to get the weights, terminals or counters of letters to work correctly next to one another. After the letters are complete, the kerning phase begins in a program like Fontlab, which takes additional time. Thinking about how letters work together in words and sentences helps the most. A helpful professor once taught me the best way to begin a typeface is to take inspiration from something like a piece of architecture or a subtle part of nature. Sometimes an idea can even come from a single letter, sign or old poster that does not have a full alphabet built out. It is the type designer's job to fill in the blanks."

But whatever level and style of typography you're doing, Photoshop can be part of the process. Alexander Klement says he "always works in a non-destructive way with my Photoshop files. Smart layers are my best friend, they are so useful in keeping layers clean and manageable with lots going on within the nested Smart layer. I also use adjustment layers and on occasion Smart filters." Stankevich uses Photoshop "to enhance my drawings with colour and to combine and collage elements from different drawings into one composition. I also use it to create patterns from the artwork. My primary tool is the Brush with all its various presets, as well as the Gradient tool for colour effects. I also use masking and layer blending

© Bart van Delft

> "I think colour plays a large part in my lettering style, so I like to be able to work in colour from the start and working in Photoshop means than I play with a lot of different colourways at the same time or with a few clicks"

LINZIE HUNTER / WWW.LINZIEHUNTER.CO.UK

© Seth Mach

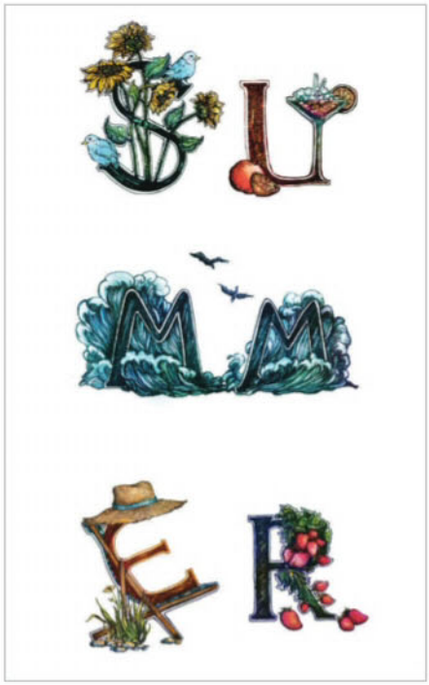
M: Seth Mach says he has taken inspiration from Art Nouveau when "designing softer flourishes or nature-based explorations"

CASE STUDY: FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN

JANELLE CUMMINS EXPLAINS HOW SHE COMBINES WORDS AND MOVEMENT

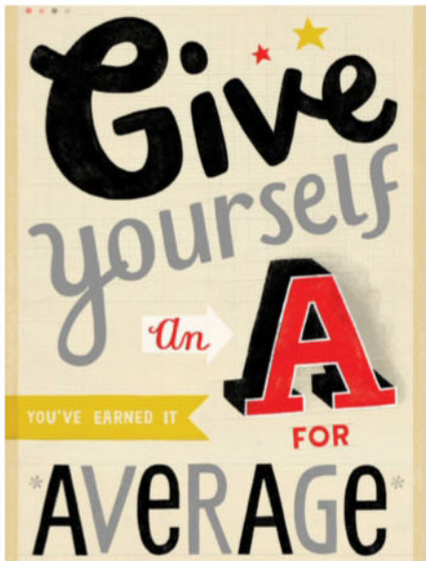
Motion graphics designer Janelle Cummins created a piece in her final year at the Savannah College of Art and Design called Fear of the Unknown, and she enjoyed the freedom it being a personal project gave her.

"While most of the project used typography as texture," she explains,"the very first scene depended heavily on type for communication. I chose to use a Moorish proverb to depict the theme of 'Fear of the Unknown'. I worked out of sequence and designed my third and fourth frames first so that I could get an idea of the visual language of the piece. Once that was done, I experimented with different computer generated fonts. I looked at serifs, sans serifs, geometric, slabs, basically everything in my font library. Nothing felt personal or tactile enough for this piece. So, I made the decision to use my own hand crafted type. I used a computer generated font to determine the layout, hierarchy, color and size of the text. Once I was pleased with this I rewrote everything with my own handwriting and used the Pen tool to create cutout paper letter forms. Using my own handwriting was not the first solution I came up with, but I am glad that it was the final solution, as it personalised the piece."



© Anastasia Stankevich

Summer: "My illustration style is all about combining traditional drawing techniques with digital enhancement," says Anatasia Stankevich, "using Photoshop to improve composition and add colour and richness to my line drawing"



© Linzie Hunter

A For Average: "My style is playful, sometimes considered 'naive,'" says Linzie Hunter, who has created a series of uninspiring quote posters. She likes to mix "contrasting styles and often intersperses upper and lowercase characters"

EDIT LETTERFORMS WITH THE PEN TOOL

MARTIN SCHMETZER EXPLAINS HIS PROCESS WHEN USING THE PEN TOOL TO MODIFY LETTERFORMS

01 | NO MAN IS AN ISLAND

"I use the scanned sketch as base to redraw my letters using the Pen tool and geometric shapes. The vertical strokes of each letter I often build up with a rectangle that I copy/paste to each position to get the same width on each line. Actually the whole letters are often made up by several separate blocks and islands before I merge the shapes together to create one single path."

02 | OUTER LIMITS

"When you are working with the Pen tool," adds Schmetzer, "a good tip is to place your anchor points on the extremities of each letterform. Don't try to force it but it usually helps to use as few anchor points as possible to keep the rounded shapes smooth and seamless."

03 | IN COLOUR

Schmetzer tries to stick to one colour during this process, both because he believes "a well executed design should look good as a one-color artwork, so it's a kind of a quality assurance for me to have this process. Another tip to check the quality of a design is to flip the design horizontal and see if it still feels balanced when mirrored."

modes on a regular basis; the Color, Overlay and Multiply modes are essential when adding colour to the linework. Recently I've discovered the Mixer Brush tool, which has allowed me to be more experimental when adding textures and mimicking traditional colouring methods. I love all these tools for making my work process a lot faster and letting me create unique mixed media illustrations as well as giving the final piece a more clean and polished look."

Hunter says: "I know many hand-lettering artists start with grid paper and do their sketches in pencil first, but I tend to do all my sketches digitally these days. I use a bog standard Wacom pen and tablet to sketch my lettering out in Photoshop. This is a much more efficient way for me to work and I find it just as easy, if not easier to draw on the computer than on paper. I like the flexibility it allows me to play about with layout and make changes quickly. This is especially useful when trying to visualise a book or magazine cover. I think colour plays a large part in my lettering style, so I like to be able to work in colour from the start and working in Photoshop means than I play with a lot of different colourways at the same time or with a few clicks. When creating my sketches I use a variety of dry and wet Photoshop brushes. Some I have created myself, but not all. I also also draw a fair bit freehand with the Lasso tool, especially when blocking in lettering during the early stages of a commission. Once the rough version of the lettering is approved by a client, I'll use that as the base layer and then move onto the final high-res art. At this stage I pay a lot more attention to spacing and flow. I will make sure all my lines are clean as required, and will add any decorative details or textures using brushes or scanned textures."

MASTER 3D LETTERING IN PHOTOSHOP

Of course, hand-lettering and the hipster look isn't the only thing happening in typography. Williams has observed various other trends that are dominating the typographic landscape. These include: "Angled hard shadows falling off 3D type," which he describes as "sexy, popular, yet shady, like a femme fatale." Then there's "'Ugly' type, where the type is distorted and transformed in a faux-naive fashion, disregarding conventional rules such as holding the Shift key down when you transform the scale of the type, lending it an avant-garde, artful aesthetic, especially when paired with a certain Yves Klein-y deep blue." And "stripes. This is one trend I am definitely a fan of, though it's not just limited to type. Using stripes to create simple 3D forms, type or otherwise." Lastly, "impossible shapes. Escher-like 3D forms that are confusing yet somehow very pleasing to behold. This is everywhere! I love using this trick but it has become so ubiquitous that I generally only use it as part of a wider stylistic approach, or if a client specifically requests it."

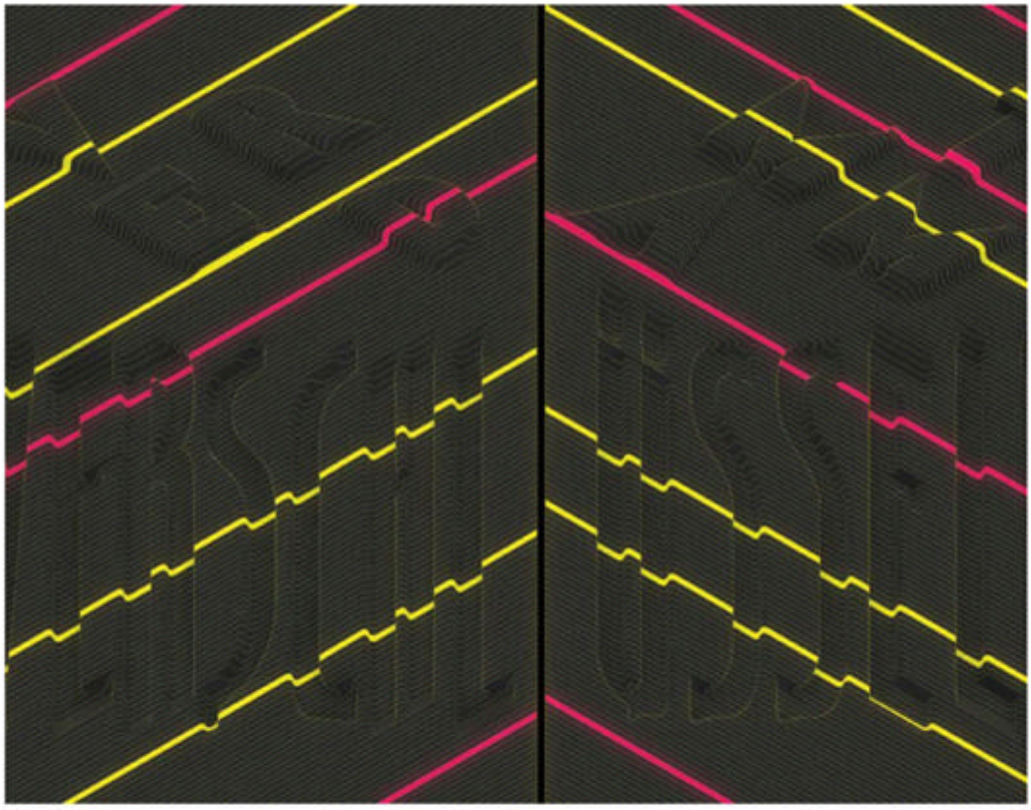
© Charles Williams

Soho House: Charles Williams admits "It's difficult when you spend all your time working with type and images as your eyes and brain become hyper-attuned to the intricacies of the work you and others are creating, so you are less good at identifying areas of illegibility that the general non-designer public would struggle with"

As Photoshop has become more and more powerful in terms of creating 3D, this is clearly a typographic path that is going to be pursued. "3D typography has exploded in use over the last few years with many people using Cinema 4D to create 3D text and then bringing that in to Photoshop to compose and tweak," says Klement. "I have noticed a current trend in getting 3D typography to look as real as possible with realistic textures while still holding a polished 3D generation. In my personal work I am also trying to achieve this realistic 3D look, I work in Cinema 4D with the many tools available to create 3D letterforms which I then render out in separate passes to tweak later in Photoshop, with the separate layers I can blend them together."

But – perhaps because of the intricacies of hand-drawn and 3D work – there's also a shift in typographic style toward the less-is-more approach. "The idea of minimalism, specifically regarding typography, makes a lot of sense to me," says Nickerson. "The main purpose of typography is to inform and hopefully enhance an idea. It's our way of putting crazy ideas into a somewhat tangible form, so breaking things down to its bare content and having a clear idea of what is trying to be explained seems like a good route to take."

For Mach, graphic design as a whole is going through a transitional period because "designers



© Charles Williams

In code: Charles Williams specialises in text that is challenging to read, and this was a particularly challenging brief, for Wired Germany. The aim was to "create a typographic double page spread to accompany a feature about quantum cryptography"

Jazz it up: Describing himself as "pretty old school when it comes to Photoshop," here Williams used the program "to add subtle shading to the image to accentuate the legibility of the vector type"

Learning to read: "Coming up with a solution that both challenged legibility (as part of the concept), but could also be easily read," was the key challenge here. Perfect for a designer who says he questions legibility, admitting he now puts a little more onus on it than he used to, because he "got bored of non-designers saying 'Cool....what is it?'"

Font of all fonts: Williams doesn't have favourite font, he sees "in the same way a bricklayer sees his/her bricks or a surgeon sees his/her scalpels: tools of the trade. I use type as a springboard for something else – a combination of type and image, so I create bespoke type for each project that forms the basis for the more elaborate, 'exploded' end product. I often look to bold geometric san-serif type-faces for 'inspiration', such as DIN 1451 and Gotham"

Lost in translation?: Williams was pleased with the results, although, since the text is in German, "it was hard to ascertain the legibility. The client had no problem reading the final version, whereas even I struggled!"

EXTRUDE 3D TEXT IN PHOTOSHOP

BART VAN DELFT EXPLAINS HOW YOU CAN ADD DEPTH TO YOUR WORDS. FIRST, HE SAYS, GET YOUR CONCEPT CLEAR

01 | INTO THE THIRD DIMENSION

Start off with a texture, says van Delft, then create your text with "a nice variety of fonts or just one really beautiful one. Then apply the 3D effect and play a little with the depth of the extrusion and lighting. Once you have the perfect position of your text you can start adding the texture to the sides of the element. Try to make it look natural."

02 | SHADE YOURSELF

"Now it's time to make it look a little bit cooler," he says, "so we are going to add some shadows and extra manual lighting. I added a light in the upper-left corner and a shadow in the lower-right corner, these layers are on top of the rest. After this step I have added a drop shadow to the text and a manual long shadow to both parts of the text layer."

03 | SMOKE AND MIRRORS

"This is where the fun starts; we are going to freestyle. In this example I have created a little extra depth to the scene by adding elements in front and behind the text. I have gone for a little smoke and some rocks to make it look more dramatic. The depth effect is enhanced by making the elements close to the camera a little blurry. Now imagine these layers in a website moving slightly from each other depending on your mouse movement."

© Alexander Klement

Lathe: Alexander Klement created his custom typeface Lathe from Futura "as I wanted to give the font a new twist and add to its visual language," he explains

© Martin Schmetzer

> "The main purpose of typography is to inform and hopefully enhance an idea. It's our way of putting crazy ideas into a somewhat tangible form"
>
> **BRANDON NICKERSON / WWW.BNICKS.COM**

© Andy Hau

KaWaii Desu: Andy Hau knows that "Photoshop aficionados hate it because it can look unconvincing," but he is a big fan of drop shadows. "Sometimes, even the faintest of drop shadow can help enormously to bring out the legibility and readability of your text," he says

are redefining the acceptable stylisations of typography. There is a combination of several hundred years of experimentation and discovery that is now readily available through the Internet. In lettering, nearly every style is flourishing including scripts, three-dimensional type extrusions, hand-drawn elements and even physical, sculptural letterforms that are being built and photographed. None of these are really new, but the combinations coming about are novel and in flux. In digital development, web fonts are one of the most dramatic and helpful additions. Many of these options are free and easily accessible. Typographic translation across platforms is also getting better and more user friendly overall. With the beneficial advent of Opentype that can support multiple glyphs, ligatures and iterations of the same letter, designers should look forward to a bright future for more dynamic options and end results."

Perhaps it is because we are becoming so tech-obsessed with short attention spans, but having "condensed information that is easy to digest is definitely a plus these days," adds Nickerson. This is demonstrated, he says, by "the vast amount of sans serif fonts: the simplest letterform." For Hau, it's "the resurgence of normcore (aka Hipster 2.0: the Second Coming)," which has "brought back a lot of ideas from the Nineties and Noughties; stark, inoffensive and neutral typefaces kerned tightly, which are either all caps or no caps." So perhaps – despite the rules and the flourishes, the terminology and technicalities of typography – minimalism is where it's really at.

Sphinx of
Black Quartz
Judge my Vow

ADD HAND-DRAWN EFFECTS TO FONTS

LEARN HOW TO CREATE BEAUTIFULLY WEATHER-BEATEN PAINTED LETTERING WITHOUT EVER TOUCHING A PAINTBRUSH

There is something very nostalgic and whimsical about old-fashioned painted fairground signs. The way that these signs manage to draw power from the world that they depict makes them so attractive and intriguing. They somehow capture the electric velocity of the attractions and offer the viewer a glimpse into them experience they're about to embark on.

Unlike modern typography, which seems to be either self-consciously quirky or painfully utilitarian, fairground typography is unapologetic in its relentless desire to provoke an emotional response from the viewer. Perhaps it is because of their ability to entice and beguile that has meant that painted fairground signs have changed very little since their inception and even the recent renaissance of fairground typography has produced little more than mere pastiches of the original.

In this tutorial, we are going to create a weather-beaten painted sign for the digital age – one that requires no paintbrushes and no paint. Drawing colour inspiration from the effervescent lights of the fairground and incorporating the jubilant flourishes of its rides, the aim is to capture the excitement of the fair by any means possible. So come and run away to the circus with us and let's get started!

OUR EXPERT

ANDY HAU
www.andyhau.com
@andykwhau

Andy Hau is a London-based architect, designer and the owner of A.H.A Design. For him, "design is an escape from the futility of modern life, not an endorsement of it."

START WITH THE BASICS

SETTING UP THE FOUNDATIONS FOR YOUR LETTERING

01 CHOOSE YOUR COLOUR PALETTE

To create an ombré effect reminiscent of fairground signs for the lettering, choose colours that naturally blend well together. I've chosen orange (d85a29) and magenta (a8118b). To make the lettering really come to life, choose a contrasting colour for the shadow: I'm using turquoise (00d5c0). For the lettering outlines, choose a metallic, gold colour (c3996c).

02 PICK A TYPEFACE

For the text, you can either hand-draw the lettering from scratch or you can cheat and take an existing cursive typeface and adapt it. Choose a typeface that has many ligatures and alternates to make the text seem natural and hand-written. There are plenty of good, open-source typefaces that are free to download, such as Lobster and Pacifico.

03 ARRANGE YOUR LETTERING

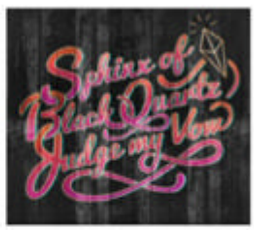
Start by sketching loosely on-screen how you want your text arranged. The lines of text should look balanced and there should be a flow that leads the eye from the beginning of the text to the end. Don't worry too much about the large gaps that are naturally formed – these will be filled with embellishments later on.

WORK IN PROGRESS

PAINTED LETTERING WITHOUT THE MESS

Progress 1: Choose the typeface

Progress 2: Bring the lettering to life



Progress 3: Add the background

04 | TYPE ON A PATH

For the first line of text, start by drawing a diagonal path using the Pen tool (P). Make sure that Path is selected in the selection box in the Toolbar. Once this is done, select the Type tool (T) and click on the path. The text will now follow the alignment of the path. Type in your text and change the size, style and tracking of the text where necessary through the Characters palette. Create new paths and repeat the process for each line of text.

QUICK TIP

Whilst this type of lettering can be created from scratch in Photoshop, you can make your life easier by creating all the text outlines in Illustrator, which offers a lot more control over the editing of objects. Once you're done, simply drag your objects from Illustrator into your Photoshop canvas.

07 | PLAY WITH OVERLAPPING

Create breaks in between areas that overlap to bring some depth to the image. This gives the impression that the letters and the embellishments are going above and under each other. Use the Polygonal Lasso tool (L) to create boundaries and delete the areas just before and after an overlap, making sure that each break is approximately the same size for a convincing effect. Be sparing with these overlaps and leave the majority of the letters alone so that you don't affect the legibility of the text.

05 | CLEAN IT UP

As with all cursive fonts, there may be letters that don't join up properly. Additionally, with the Pacifico font, the strokes of many of the letters end abruptly. These will need to be cleaned up to appear more natural and handwritten. Right-click on the text layers and select Rasterize Type. Use the Polygonal Lasso tool (L) to either delete unnecessary areas or to create additional fill areas so that the text appears clean and flowing. You can also take this opportunity to refine the placement of some of the letters.

06 | ADD SOME EMBELLISHMENTS

Embellishments not only help to add drama to the image but also help to encourage the flow of reading. Use the Pen tool (P) to add embellishments and swirls to some of the letters. To create curves, click and hold down the left Mouse Button and manipulate the handles to get the curve that you want. To edit the anchor points afterwards, select the Pen tool (V) again, hold down Cmd/Ctrl and click on the anchor point that you want to edit.

08 | ADD SOME ILLUSTRATIONS

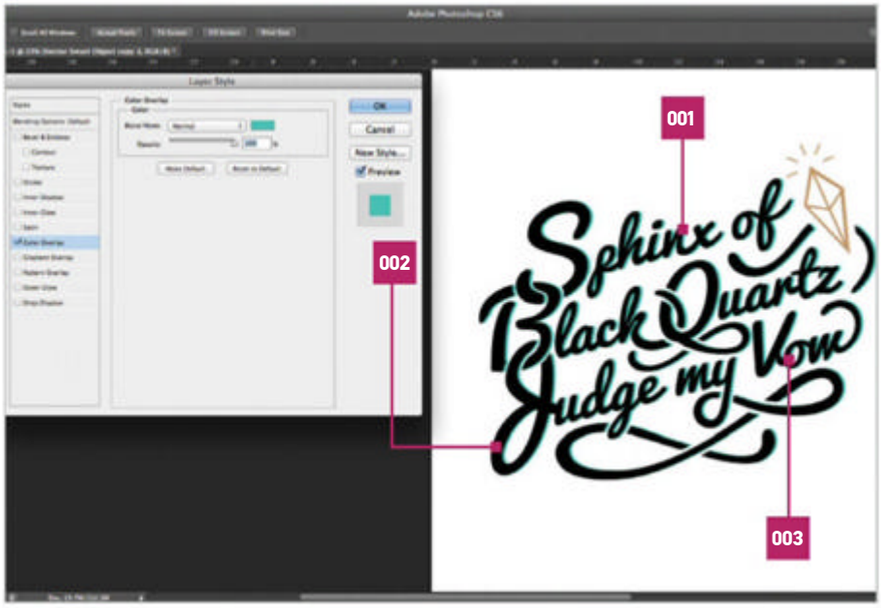
To introduce an element of fun and some unpredictability, incorporate illustrations into the lettering. Make sure that these illustrations relate to the meaning of the words and that they are stripped back and simplified so that they don't compete with the letters. To highlight the word Quartz, we are going to add a crystalline symbol. Draw this by using the Pen tool (P) – make sure that Shape is selected in the selection box in the Toolbar. Select No Colour for the Fill setting and gold for the Stroke setting.

HOW TO WORK IN TECHNICOLOR

INTRODUCE COLOUR TO YOUR LETTERING

09 | CREATE SOME SHADOWS

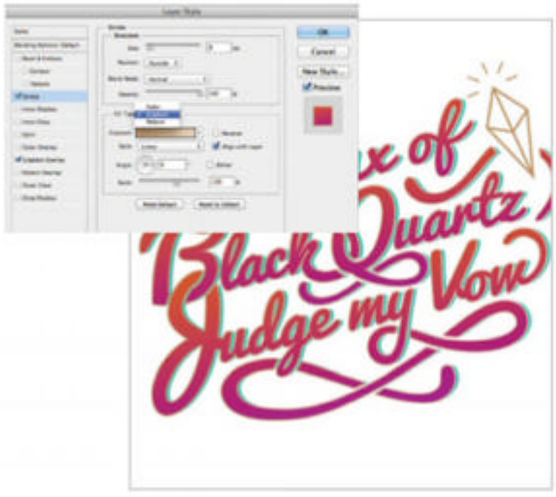
Select the layers with the lettering elements and make a copy of them. Merge these copied layers together. Place the new layer behind the existing lettering layers and move it slightly to the right to create a shadow. Double-click on the new layer and select Color Overlay. Set the colour of the overlay to the turquoise.



001 | ARRANGE THE LETTERING
A cursive font was chosen and the text was laid out. Anomalies in the lettering were cleaned up manually

002 | ADD SOME EMBELLISHMENTS
The lettering was embellished to create a more flowing look. Breaks were introduced in areas that overlap to add depth

003 | PICK THE RIGHT COLOUR
A jewel-bright gradient fill and gold coloured outline will be added to the lettering to bring it to life

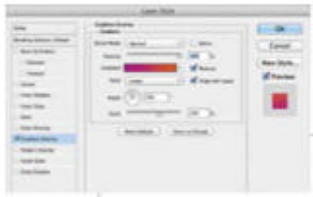


11 | TWEAK THE LETTERING OUTLINES

Double-click on the layer with the first line of lettering again and this time select Stroke. Adjust the Stroke size accordingly (approximately 8px in this case) and change the Fill colour to the gold colour we chose in Step 1. If you want to add an extra sparkle to your outlines, choose the Gradient option instead of the Color option in the Fill Type selection box and blend the gold colour with a lighter gold colour. Repeat this step for every line of text.

12 | MAKE THE BACKGROUND

Fill the Background layer in black. Drag in the repeating timber planks texture and copy it repeatedly, tiling it systematically as you go to fill the entire canvas. Merge the timber texture layers together and drain the colour out of it by selecting Image>Adjustments>Desaturate. Place the layer at the top in the Layers panel and select Hard Light as the blending mode. The text should now show through the texture as though it has been painted on top of it. Lower the opacity setting of the texture layer accordingly.



10 | SELECT GRADIENT OVERLAY

Double-click on the layer with the first line of lettering and select Gradient Overlay. Click on the Gradient box and change the colour of the gradient to the orange and magenta colours we chose in Step 1 by double-clicking on the Black and White boxes in the Gradient Editor. Change the angle of the gradient so that the orange colour aligns with the top of the text and the magenta colour aligns with the bottom of the text. Repeat this step for every line of text.

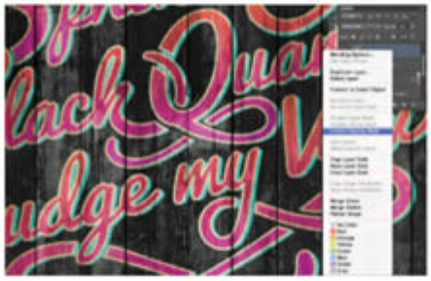
> “Fairground typography is unapologetic in its relentless desire to provoke an emotional response from the viewer”

13 | PAINT TEXTURE

Drag in the paint texture into the canvas. It's likely that the Paint texture image will not fill up the entire canvas. To extend the texture, select the layer and draw a boundary using the Polygonal Lasso tool (L) in the areas where you would like additional paint. Select Content-Aware under the Fill command (Edit>Fill) and Photoshop will add additional paint areas using the current image. Place the layer below the timber texture and change the blend mode of the layer to Screen and lower the Opacity to below 20%.

FINISHING TOUCHES

ADD THE ADJUSTMENTS TO FINISH OFF YOUR MASTERPIECE

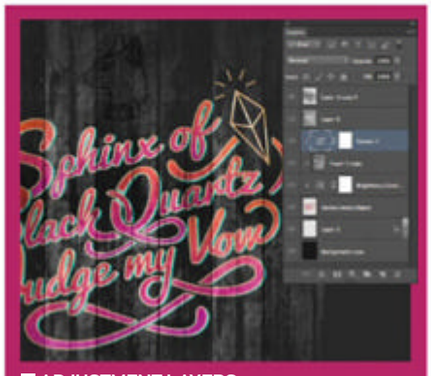


14 ADD TEXTURE TO THE TEXT

To create a subtle painted effect for the lettering, drag in the paint texture again into the canvas. Follow Step 13 to create enough paint texture so that it covers the lettering. Place this layer directly above the lettering layer in the Layers panel, right-click on it and select Create Clipping Mask. The paint texture will now be clipped by the lettering layer. Set the blend mode for the paint texture layer to Linear Light and lower the Opacity setting to below 40%.

QUICK TIP

Sometimes you just want to work on one layer without the distraction of all the others. Instead of hiding each layer manually, simply hold down Alt and click the eye symbol on the layer that you want to work on and all the other layers will be hidden.



ADJUSTMENT LAYERS

I never used to be a fan of 'non-destructive' editing – life is too short to be tentative! However, since being introduced to adjustment layers, I am now almost evangelical about them. The edits made with an adjustment layer usually affect all the layers beneath it. To apply edits to only the layer directly underneath the adjustment layer, simply select the adjustment layer in the Layers panel and then click the Clip icon at the bottom of the Properties panel. To affect multiple layers, place these layers into a Group (Cmd/Ctrl+G), place the Group directly under the adjustment layer and the effect will be applied to the whole Group.

15 CURVES ADJUSTMENT LAYERS

To correct the washed out effect that the paint textures create, click on the circular icon at the bottom of the Layers panel and select Curves. This creates a Curves adjustment layer, which will adjust the tones and contrast in the image. Place the Curves adjustment layer above the clipped paint texture layer and slowly but surely, change the RGB, Red, Green and Blue curves in the Properties panel until the contrast looks correct. Use the suggested values in the screenshot as a basis.

17 ADD AN EXTRA SOMETHING

It is always good to hide a little something in your designs to give your work a bit of an edge, it can be something obvious, or something more cryptic but they all serve to add another level of interest to the image. For this image, we added an Egyptian mau at the top. Create the illustration with the Pen tool (P) on a new layer like Step 8. Right-click on the layer and select Rasterize Layer. Change the blend mode to Subtract. The illustration will appear to have been burnt into the timber.

16 ADJUST THE VIBRANCY

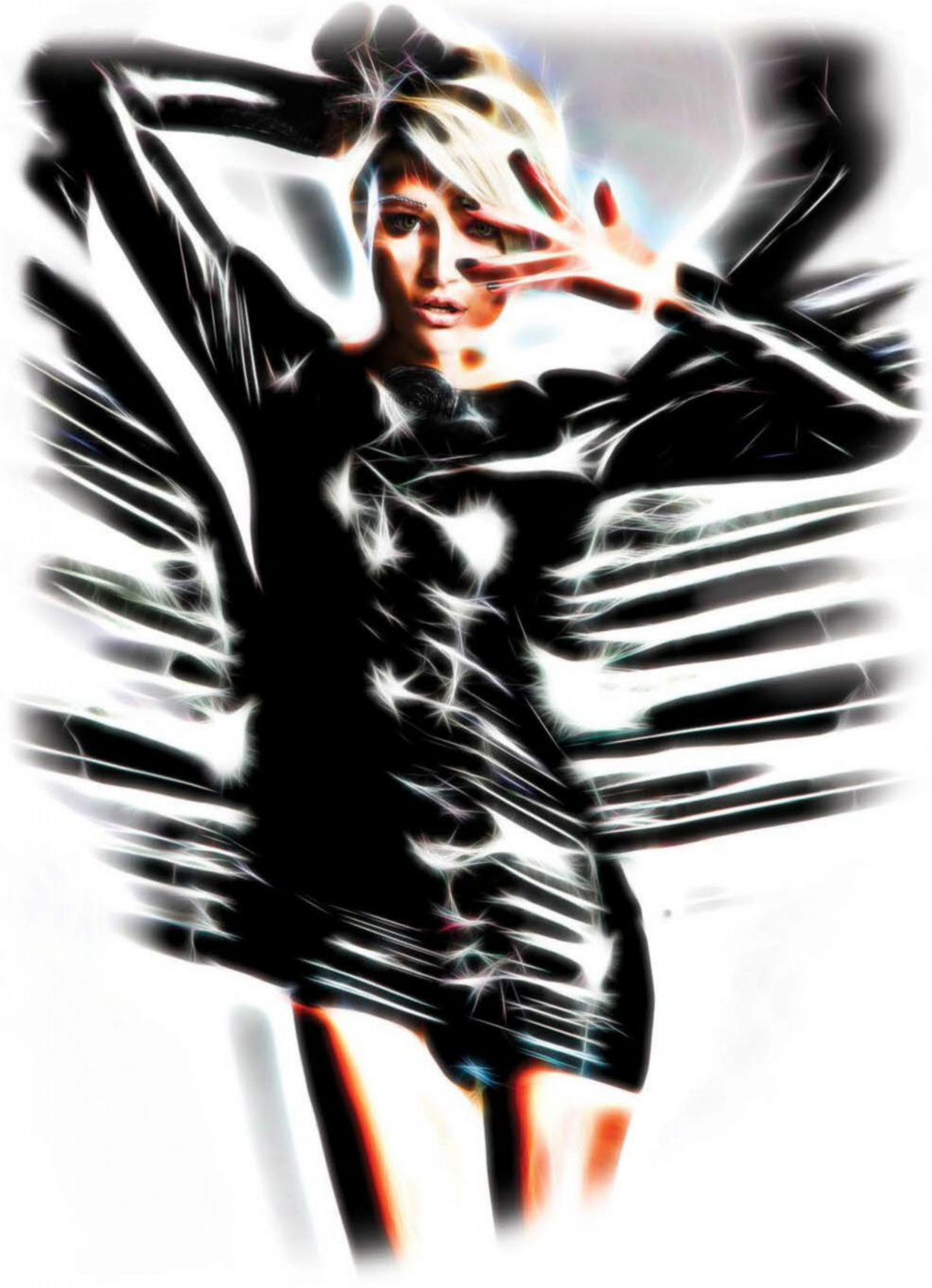
With two paint textures on top, the colours on the lettering may start to look a little muted. To bring back some of the vibrancy of these jewel-bright colours, create a Brightness/Contrast adjustment layer and place it directly on top of the lettering layer. Increase the Brightness setting until the colours look correct (approximately 15 in this case). The effect is very subtle but it's the cumulative effect of all of these subtleties that bring this image to life and make it convincing.

18 TIME TO ADMIRE YOUR DESIGN

Zoom out using Cmd/Ctrl+0 so that entire image fits onto your screen and check that you are happy with the overall composition of the image. The image should look balanced and the lettering should be easy to read. There should also be a natural flow from the start of the sentence to the very end without any distractions. Finally, make sure that the colours in the lettering are not too overwhelming and that none of the illustrations compete with the text.

AKVIS Neon

Glow Lines Effects! Photoshop Plugin for Windows & Mac



akvis.com

CREATE A LOW-POLY PLANET

LEARN THE BASICS OF 3D MODELLING IN BLENDER AND HOW TO CREATE A LOW-POLY ILLUSTRATION

Graphics are becoming better and much more complicated day by day – ten years ago a model of an object with a few thousand polygons was considered technically advanced. Nowadays we can see billions of polygons, unbelievable light and shadow, technologies on the edge of possibilities; sometimes it's even hard to separate 3D graphics and reality.

In the time of super-powered graphic cards, a new genre is born – and it's called low-poly graphics. It uses as few polygons as possible to make artwork look classic, a bit old-fashioned but still fresh and awesome. It looks simple, but low-poly art requires a huge amount of work. It's somewhat similar to jewellery making, because every polygon needs to be in the correct place, to really make the artwork shine.

In this tutorial we will learn how to create a low-poly illustration using Blender and Photoshop – from the basics of 3D modelling, to the final polishing of the image. Blender is absolutely free to use software, and you can download the latest version for your system here **www.Blender.org**.

Once you have installed it, you are ready to start this tutorial and create your first 3D low-poly illustration by following our step-by-step guide.

OUR EXPERT

ALEKSEI PUSHILIN
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Aleksei Pushilin is a 25-year-old graphic designer from Chelyabinsk, Russia. Now working in the biggest bank in the region during the day, and freelancing during the night, his true passion is to make low-poly 3D models for games, UI, maps and navigation.

SOURCE FILES

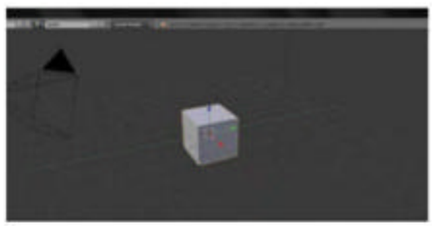
On FileSilo you will find a pack of small environment models, ready to use in your scene.

LEARN THE BASICS

SET UP THE SCENE AND CREATE THE MODEL

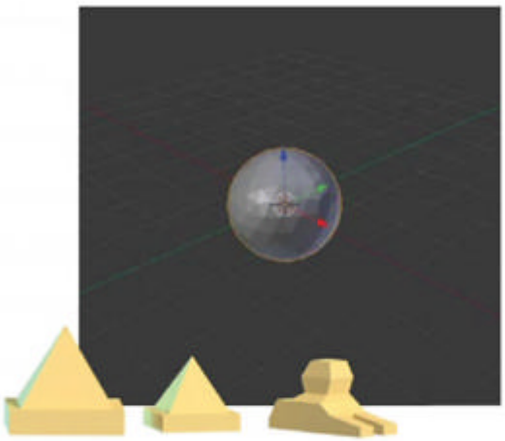
01 SET UP THE SCENE

First, launch Blender, and adjust the render parameters: change the render type to Cycles at the top of the screen, then change the render resolution on the right to 1200x1500 pixels. Don't forget to set to 100% in the window below. To reduce the noise, go to Sampling inset below, and make at least 500 samples.



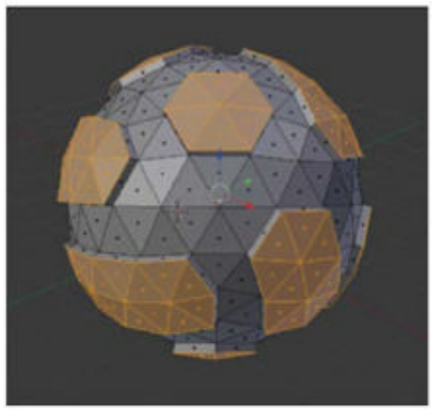
02 CREATE THE BASE MESH

Now we are ready to create the planet. First, delete the cube from the scene: right-click and press Delete. Then press Shift+A>Mesh> Ico Sphere, and immediately change its subdivisions to three, at the left bottom of the screen. You will see a faceted sphere – this is going to be the base mesh for the planet. Go to View> Camera, to change the point of view.



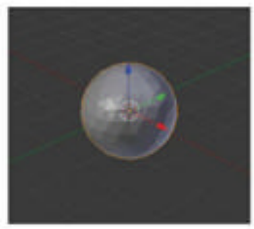
03 FORM THE LANDSCAPE

The buttons you will need are: G for Grab, S for Scale, and R for Rotate. Use them to position the sphere. After this, press TAB to switch to the Edit mode. Change selection type to Face select below, and then holding Shift select all the polygons you want to make land or mountains by right-clicking. Press E to extrude polygons, and press the left mouse button. Use Scale to adjust the height.



WORK IN PROGRESS

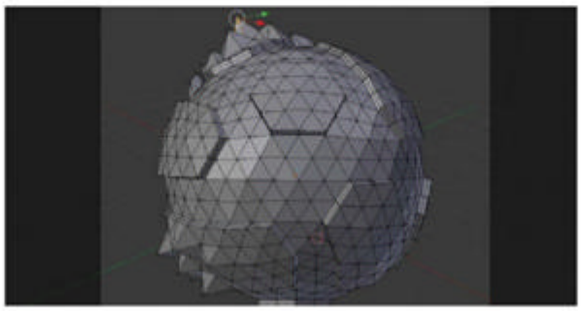
FROM SPHERE TO YOUR OWN TINY WORLD



Progress 1: Create the basic mesh

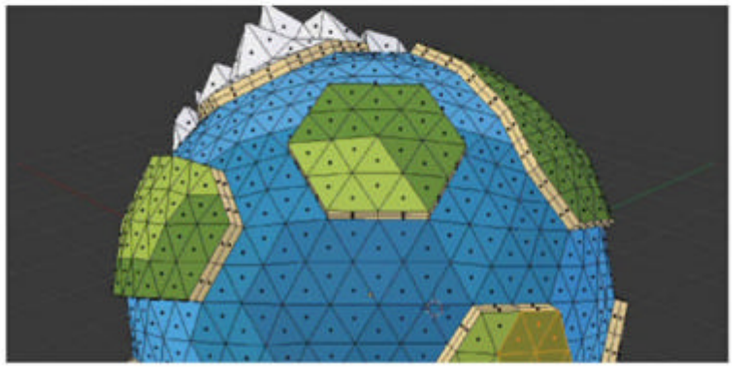
Progress 2: Add materials

Progress 3: Post-process



04 MAKE THE MOUNTAINS

Now, when we have a basic landscape, let's make it more interesting by adding mountains or hills. In Edit mode select all the polygons of the model manually, or by pressing A. Then hit W>Subdivide, this will increase the amount of polygons by two. Change selection type to Vertex, select below, and using Grab and Scale, deform the landscape to make mountains or any other landscape marks you want. Don't forget to change selection type, if needed. Don't go too crazy with it – it's good when low-poly illustrations have straight and logical form.



05 ADD SOME COLOUR

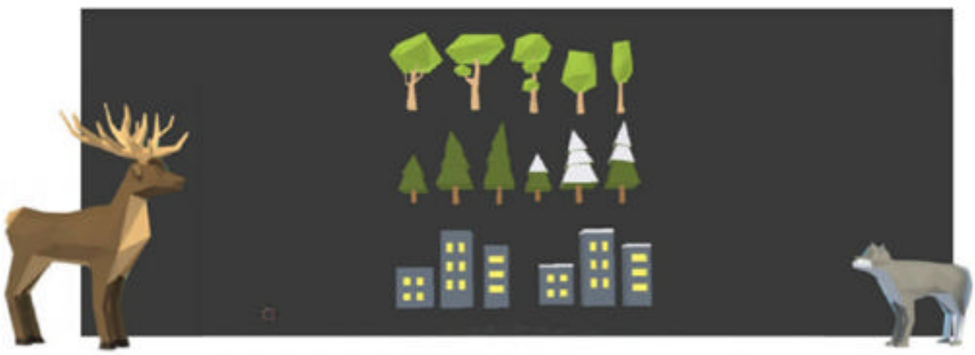
Change the Display Mode below, from Solid to Material – so you can see the changes you make. Go to Material>New. You can change it to any colour by clicking the colour box. First, make a blue one and name it 'Water'. Then click + at the top – this will enable you to create another material. Make it green for the grass, select the polygons of the land, and click Assign. You can create as many materials as you want, and paint the whole model. Don't forget to use bright and natural colours.

QUICK TIP

The Sun and the Moon are contrasting colours. The Sun is warm and yellow, and the Moon is cold and blue. This is a great way to make low-poly art seem even more faceted and sharp – when the light sources are separated on two channels from opposite sides of the model. You can improve this feature adding a few more light sources.

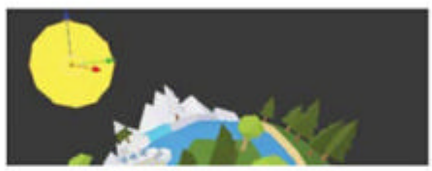
06 PLACE THE ENVIRONMENT MODELS

Now we are going to add details to the planet view. Open the file from elements.blend in another Blender window. You will see a pack of models, ready to use in your scene. Copy and Paste all of them in your main Blender window. Now adjust the Snap tool – this will help a lot. Activate the Magnet button below, select a Face Snap, Active Snap target and enable rotation with the snapping target. Now the magic begins! Use Grab to place any model onto the planet – it's so easy to do. You can Copy and Paste any model to use it twice or more.



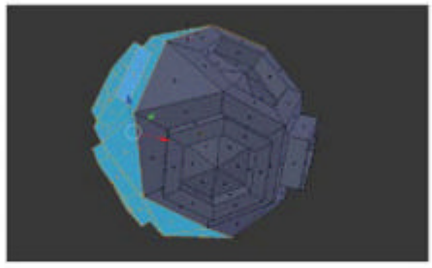
07 CREATE THE SUN

You already know how to create an Ico sphere, so let's make one for the Sun. Create an Ico sphere with two subdivisions (look at Step 2 if you get lost). Using Grab and Scale place it to the top left side of the planet, and don't forget to turn off the Snapping tool from the previous step. Now create a new material for it, but this time we will use another surface. Choose the yellow colour, and then open a surface inset above, choose emission, and change Strength to three. Now the Sun will really radiate the light.



08 CONSTRUCT THE MOON

Repeat the Steps above, and create an Ico sphere for the Moon, and place it on the bottom right side. To make it look interesting, make craters on the surface. Switch to Edit mode with Tab, select the faces of the sphere in the shape of a hexahedron, and then use E to extrude the polygons, and S to scale them, forming the craters. Three to four craters should be enough to make the Moon look nice. Then create material similar to the Sun, but blue, and paint the side polygons of the model, so they form a sickle.

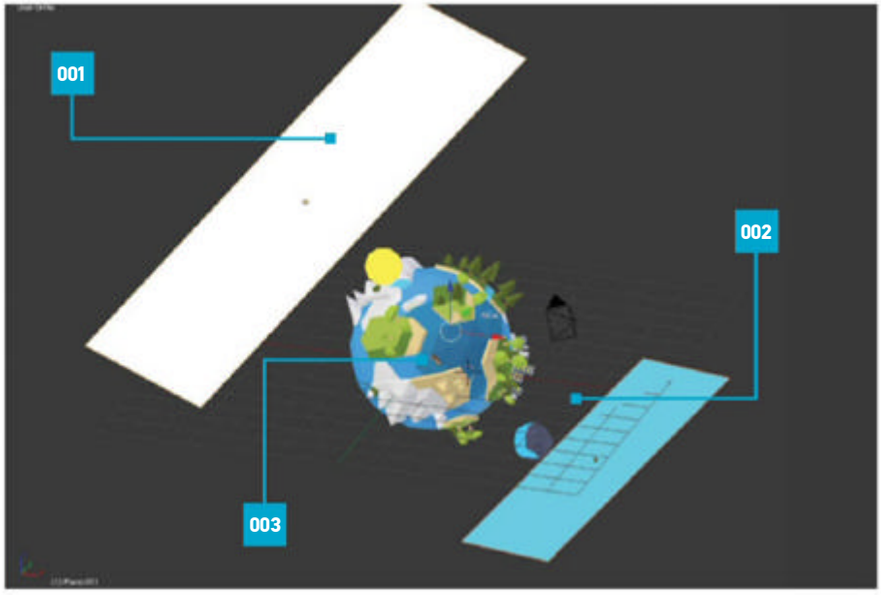


LET THERE BE LIGHT

CREATE LIGHT SOURCES FOR THE SCENE AND RENDER THE IMAGE

09 | LIGHT THE MODEL

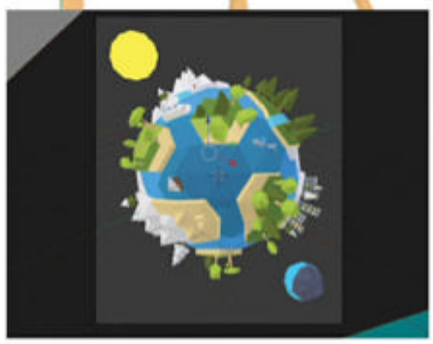
Create two big planes, by pressing Shift+A>Mesh>Plane. To make them radiate light, adjust new materials to them – blue for one, and yellow for another. Use the Emission surface, as on the Sun and Moon, but change the strength to five, which will make them brighter. Using Rotate, Scale and Grab place the planes perpendicular to the planet, yellow on the top-left side, blue on the bottom-right side.



001 | THE SIZE
When creating the planes, make sure they are much bigger than the model – at least twice the size. This will make the light much smoother

002 | THE POSITION
The best way to use planes as light sources, is to place them perpendicular to the model, but parallel to the point of view. This way the light scheme is optimal

003 | THE CAMERA
Switch to the Camera View, and check that there are no light planes in the camera field of view. You don't want to see the light planes in your final render



10 | RENDER THE MODEL

First go to Render>Film and check Transparent – now when you render the model, there should be a transparent background. Go to the Render>Render Image at the top left of the screen. You will see how your model is rendered in real time. This will take a while depending on your computer. If the render looks too noisy, increase the samples parameter. Also, you can press Esc to abort the render, if you want to change something in the scene. After you are done, press Image>Save As Image at the bottom left of the screen to save your render.

> "The goal of low-poly artwork is to emphasise the faceted, polygonal look"

11 | CREATE THE BACKGROUND

You are now finished with Blender, launch Photoshop and open the render you have saved from the previous step. If you have done everything right you will see a planet on a transparent background. Now create a new layer, take a Gradient tool with #144e96 and #192841 colours, and drag it from the bottom right corner, to the top left – so the darkest part of the gradient should be under the Moon, and the brightest under the Sun. Don't forget to check the Dithering to make the gradient look smoother.

12 | ADJUST THE COLOUR

It's much faster to correct and adjust the lightness and the colour of the render in Photoshop. The render result greatly depends on the colour you have chosen and how you placed the light sources. To get the best result, use Levels and Saturation to make your render bright enough to see what happens on the Moon side, and dark enough to feel the night and day border – the balance is what you're looking for. Adjust the colours so they are not too bright and keep the natural look.

13 | APPLY A FILTER

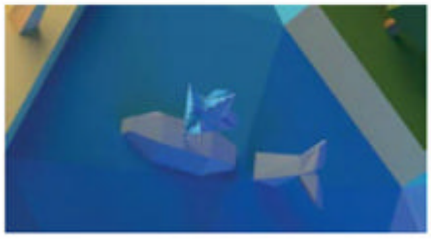
The goal of low-poly artwork is to emphasise the faceted, polygonal look. After you make a render, you can improve the faceted look by applying the Smart Sharpen filter. Go to Filter>Sharpen>Smart Sharpen. Be very accurate with this tool, you should catch the edge between polygons, but shouldn't make the whole model look noisy. A one to two pixel radius and 50% effect should be enough, but this depends mostly on what you want to get as the result.

FINAL STEPS

PAINT OVER THE RENDER

14 ADD MORE CONTRAST

To make the model look even better, you can manually paint the polygons. This is a great way to add contrast and adjust the faceted look, because the real render is sometimes not as expressive as it should be. Create a new layer, select the Pen tool, and select polygons on the border between light and dark, or polygons on small models, to attract more attention to them. There are two rules: first, make the light polygons lighter and the dark darker, so the contrast increases. And second, use smooth big brushes. The best results are when the painted polygons are not distinguishable from the non-painted ones.

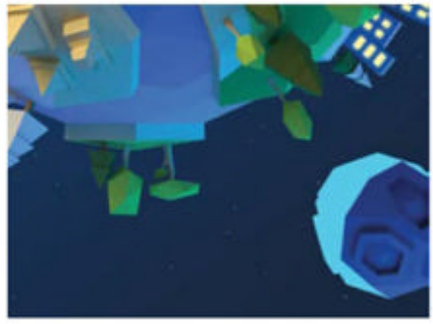


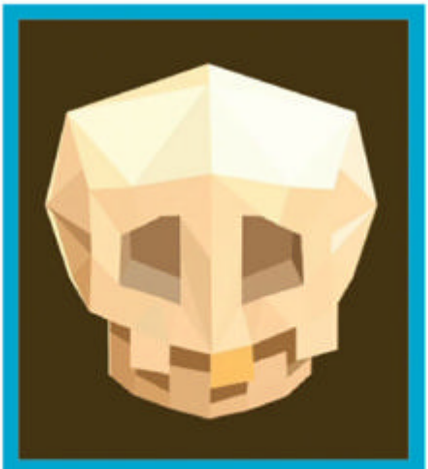
15 INTRODUCE SOME GLOW

All the effects like glow, halo, flares and lighting are almost always made in post processing, not in a 3D redactor, because it's much easier and faster. Let's make a little diffuse glow around the emission polygons, to make it look shiny. Select the Magic Wand tool, and click on every yellow light polygon, except the sun. Then make the selection of a new layer by pressing Cmd/Ctrl+J or go to Layer>New>Create on a new layer. Then go to Filter>Blur>Gaussian Blur, and use it with five to six pixels. After this, change the blend mode to Screen.

16 MAKE THE STARS

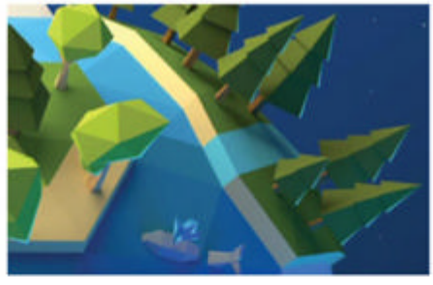
To make the space more beautiful and realistic you should add some stars. Usually such things are made with Soft brushes, but in low-poly art a pencil will do a much better job. So create a new layer, take the Pencil tool with a two to three pixel radius to make big stars, then make one-pixel-radius small stars. You can use white and blue colours for them, and you should only put them on the dark side of the space. Don't make too many though as they might take too much attention away from the main model.





17 REFLECT THE LIGHT

To make the two colour light scheme look even better, you should manually create patches of reflected light on the borders of the model. It's a very tricky thing, so be careful. Create a new layer, using the Pen tool, select sharp and thin borders that are addressed to the Moon, and paint them with a bright blue colour like #00e1ff. These patches should be solid with no gradient. This will add a depth to the scene, but don't make too many of them.



18 LIGHT UP THE SUN

Last, but not the least, create a filling light from the Sun. Create a new layer, pick a bright yellow colour like #ffff87 and a Gradient tool. Drag a Radiant Gradient from the Sun, forming the big spot of light. After this, go to the Blend modes of the layer and change it to Screen. Adjust the Transparency of the layer by 50-60%, or more, if you'd like a brighter light in your scene.

SIMULATE 3D LOW POLY IN 2D

As the low-poly genre becomes more and more popular, more people are trying it out, but not everyone knows how to do it properly. To learn the basics of Blender, you should probably spend few days learning, but it could take an eternity to learn every aspect of it. The same could be said about any other 3D software. However, there is an alternative way – you can simulate low-poly 3D style using any 2D redactor you like, vectors in Illustrator, or the Pen in Photoshop. The pros of this method are you will not waste your time on theory of 3D modelling, and waiting hours for your model to render. But the cons are you will never get the right lighting and shading in a flat illustration.

QUICK TIP

If you find a mistake that cannot be fixed in Photoshop, you can render it again. You can either delete objects you don't need, so you don't have to wait for the whole scene to render, or, if you see the part you need appear before the render finishes, press Esc and save the image. Paste it on the top of the first layer and erase everything that you don't need.

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“I used to hear opinions that it’s impossible to create a feminine portrait without curves, so I made it a challenge for myself to prove the opposite”

LOW POLY
WOJTEK FUS

DISCOVER HOW THIS IMAGE COMBINES DIGITAL PAINTING WITH A LOW-POLY STYLE TO CREATE A UNIQUE AND BEAUTIFUL PIECE OF ARTWORK

Low-poly is often thought of as either 3D or vector, but either way its treatment of colour is often solid. In this image, 22-year-old artist Wojtek Fus combines the low-poly style with painterly colour and texture to create something unique. "In my Low Poly portrait series I'm sticking to the concept that everything in my painting will be either a straight line or a triangular shape," he explains. "I used to hear opinions that it's impossible to create a feminine portrait without curves, so I made it a challenge for myself to prove the opposite. Setting up a few strong rules before you start painting will save you a lot of trouble later in the process and will make your artwork stand out. Make sure you are not afraid of experiments and stick to what you have planned in the first place!"

The image is part of a series (two images so far) that Fus describes as "All about balancing out stylisation and realism together. Most of the time stylisation means simplifying or exaggerating, subtracting what's unnecessary to make room for the features [and] themes you are captured by. On the opposite side there is realism, which means depicting things as they are. In order to create a convincing stylised painting I had to have an opinion on what to extract from the realistic image I was interpreting and twist it to my own taste and own vision. It can mean stylising shapes, exaggerating colours, [and] playing around with the anatomy."

01 HAVE A PLAN

This is always my first step. I am thinking about my portrait as I would think about designing a logo. I want something bold, unique and I want it to communicate a certain mood. In this case I am using as many straights as possible. I don't care where the lines end, I will use these intersections to my advantage in the later stages, when I will be building shapes on top of them.

02 CREATE THE SHAPES

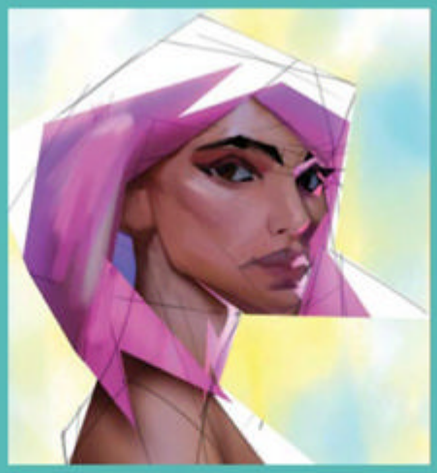
Then I extract the shapes from the lines, picking interesting angles that will give the artwork an energetic composition.

03 USE BRUSHES

Locking the transparency of the shapes I created enables me to work inside of them with a soft brush, getting the form somewhat right. I use different blending modes on the brush (Multiply, Overlay, Color Dodge, Soft Light) to get nice colour richness.

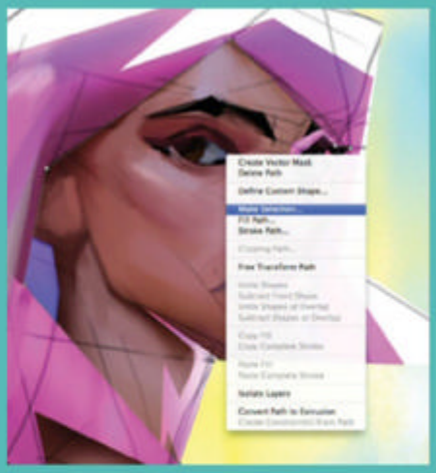
04 START RENDERING

Now, I go in and start to render the features like eyes, nose and mouth with just a couple of brushes. It's not really that important which brush you will use, you can do it perfectly fine with just a standard Round brush.



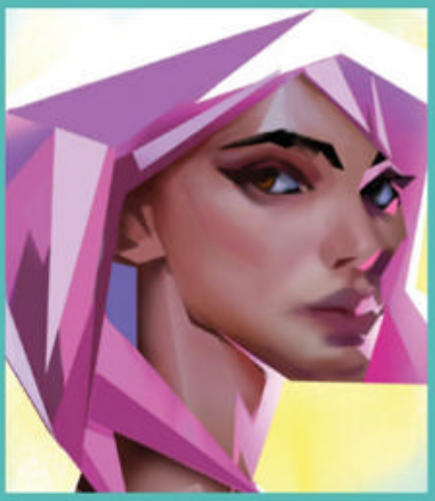
05 SELECT AREAS TO PAINT

Making a selection around the area you're painting means that you can keep the precise low-poly shapes but combine them with the brush strokes and colour effects you get from rendering with brushes.



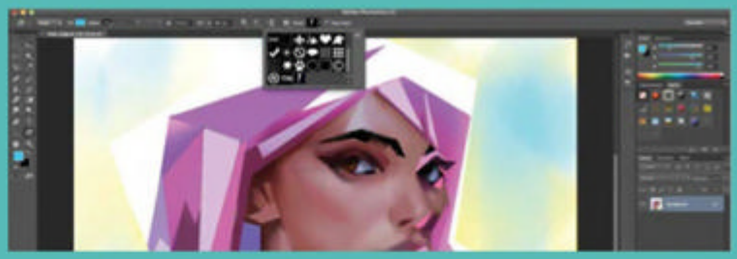
06 MAKE IT LOW POLY

Then I paint on top, grabbing the Polygonal Lasso tool, creating triangular shapes in strategic places, filling them in with a flat colour that I pick from underneath.



07 CREATE CUSTOM SHAPES

To quickly create Custom Shapes that can be used more than once, make a selection with the Pen tool, Right-click and choose Define Custom Shape – it will now be in the Shape dropdown and can be re-used again and again.



08 FINISHING TOUCHES

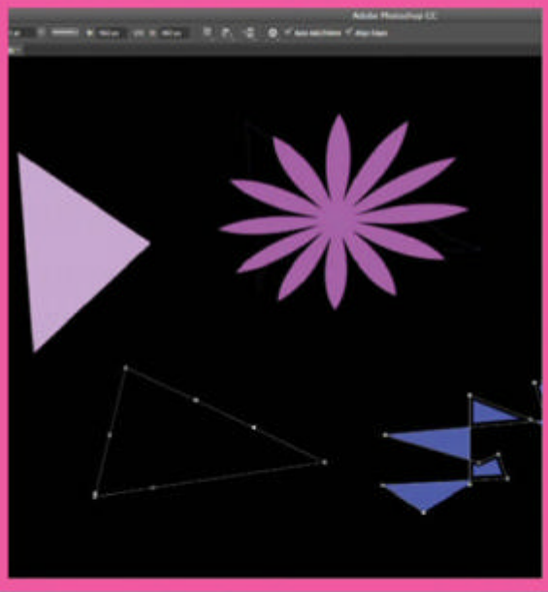
In this step you can see that I am building on top of what I have established before. In the later stages of your painting it's really easy to get distracted by the details, so make sure you are staying focused! I have applied some postproduction with a Color Lookup adjustment layer with the preset Crisp Winter.

PEN TOOL TRICKS

HOW THE PEN TOOL WORKS AND WHAT YOU CAN USE IT FOR

The Pen tool can be set to Shape or Path on the toolbar at the top of the interface. When set to Path there are a number of different tools that you can select from the Pen tool icon. The regular Pen tool lets you click around the outline of a shape to make a Path. The Freeform Pen tool lets you draw freehand and is ideal for using with a graphics tablet. The Add, Delete and Convert Point tools allow you to modify the paths you've created.

When set to Shape, the Pen tool will generate vector shapes on a new shape layer as you make points on the path. These can be complex and intersect with each other. All shapes and paths made with the Pen tool can be made into Selections and Custom Shapes, and the paths can have a stroke and/or fill applied.



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TURN PHOTOS INTO PAINTINGS

LEARN HOW TO TURN STOCK PHOTOS INTO COLOURFUL AND VIVID WATERCOLOUR STYLE PAINTINGS

In this tutorial, you will learn how to take separate photo images and turn them into a colourful, watercolour style painting. A combination of layer effects, filters, layer masking and general creativity will bring the art to life. A graphics tablet with pen pressure capabilities will be needed as a majority of the tutorial will require brush strokes and opacity that a mouse cannot easily achieve. At least a basic knowledge of the Photoshop interface and tools are also needed. Stock photos will be used as an integral part of the artwork, but both premium and free stock is readily available to find and use online. The main image can be purchased from **Dreamstime.com** (code 37368747); the flowers can all be downloaded for free from **www.freeimages.com** (search petals, poppies and wildflowers), and the background paper texture can be downloaded for free from **www.CGTextures.com** (filename PaperDecorative0026_3_L).

Inspiration for this tutorial stems from the look of traditional watercolour on textured paper, and combining it with the myriad of colours and techniques available for digital mediums. Photoshop is the easiest to use as it simplifies the process of prepping photo files while also supplying the tools and methods needed to create manually. This tutorial requires only a certain styled brush that can be used for more watercolour projects in the future.

OUR EXPERT
GENEVA BENTON
GenevaB.com

Geneva Benton is a self-taught American artist who creates for a living and as a way of self expression. She prefers to use bright bold colours and organic shapes.

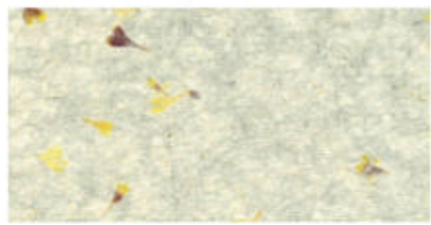
SOURCE FILES
On FileSilo is a single brush .ABR file that can be used for the majority of the tutorial steps. The brush can be edited to the user's needs.

GET STARTED WITH STOCK

USE STOCK PHOTOS TO LAY DOWN YOUR FOUNDATION

01 SET UP THE FILE AND BASE

The aim is to turn photos into a watercolour illustration. First, create a new document (File>New), at least 1500 pixels high and wide, at 300DPI. Fill it with a paper-like pattern or image. You can create your own, use a pre-made stock, or use a pattern. In this tutorial, a stock paper texture is being used.



02 ADD THE WOMAN

The next step is to bring in your stock image. The subject of this art is a woman with flowers decorating her hair and clothing. On a new layer (Layer>New>New Layer) bring in your stock photo of a woman and fill the entire document with it (Edit>Transform>Scale). We will mask her for the background in a few more steps.

03 ADD THE FLOWER SNAPS

Next is to bring in your flower stock photos. On a new set of layers, cut out or mask out the flowers (Layer>Layer Mask>Reveal All) and separate petals from your stock photos and layer them over the top of her hair, bandeau, and cloth. To create variance and volume, you can continuously copy and paste flower bits and petals.

WORK IN PROGRESS

FROM STOCK TO FINISHED ARTWORK

Progress 1: Set up stock photos

Progress 2: Colour over stock photos

Progress 3: Finishing touches

04 RECOLOUR THE FLOWERS

Continue to layer your flowers and petals. Do not fill the intended areas completely with stock, as it will be filled with simpler brushed petals in future steps. Mask off or erase any areas of the flowers that are not completely clean, and group the flower layers together (Layer>New>Group). Merge the group together. Next, desaturate your merged group (Image>Adjustments>Desaturate), then recolour it to an aesthetically pleasing matching red colour (Image>Adjustments>Hue/Saturation).

07 SET UP TO COLOUR IN

Once your new linework is cleaned up, set the layer settings of both layers to Multiply. You should be able to see the flowers and woman underneath. Next, duplicate the woman layer again underneath the original, and fill it (Edit>Fill) with a neutral colour matching the background. This will be the base when masking inside the main layers. The next several steps will be focused on detailing the woman. Create a new group for the woman layer only and attach a blank white mask onto this group.

05 MASK FOR THE BACKGROUND

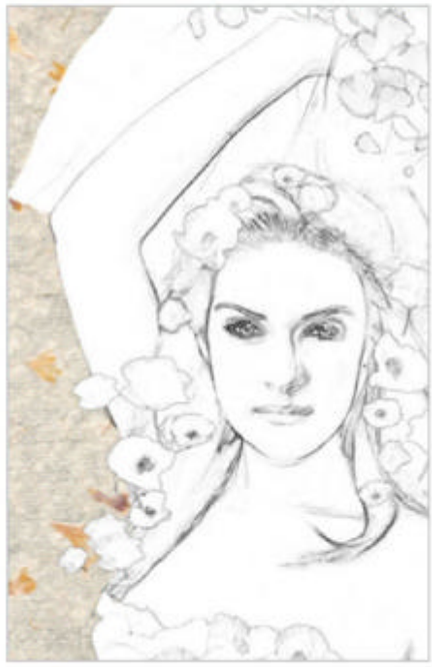
Next, time to clean up and mask your female stock photo. To get a crisp, accurate mask, use the Pen tool (P). For smaller, more detailed areas, use a small Hard Round brush (B) in combination with a tablet. The goal is to show the earlier paper texture base underneath, so mask off any open space areas that aren't explicitly the subject matter or the flowers. Make sure to keep the mask enabled as it will also be needed for future steps.

QUICK TIP

Importing brushes into Photoshop is quick and easy. Simply double-click on the brush to import it or import manually by clicking the drop down menu on the Brush Presets Panel (Window>Brush Presets) and selecting Load Brushes. You can also save your own premade brushes by going to Edit>Preset Manager.

08 MASK OUT HIGHLIGHTS

This step requires masking with the Brush tool, preferably with a tablet. On FileSilo there is a simple watercolour-style brush called Spongy Brush. Import this brush into Photoshop. It can be easily adjusted for different areas by changing the Spacing and Shape. On the woman group mask, mask out the lighter, highlighted areas, showing the neutral colour underneath. Use variety in the size and shape of the brush for more creative masking. Afterwards, use Color balance (Image>Adjustments>Color balance) to add a reddish tint to the image.



06 CREATE THE LINE ART

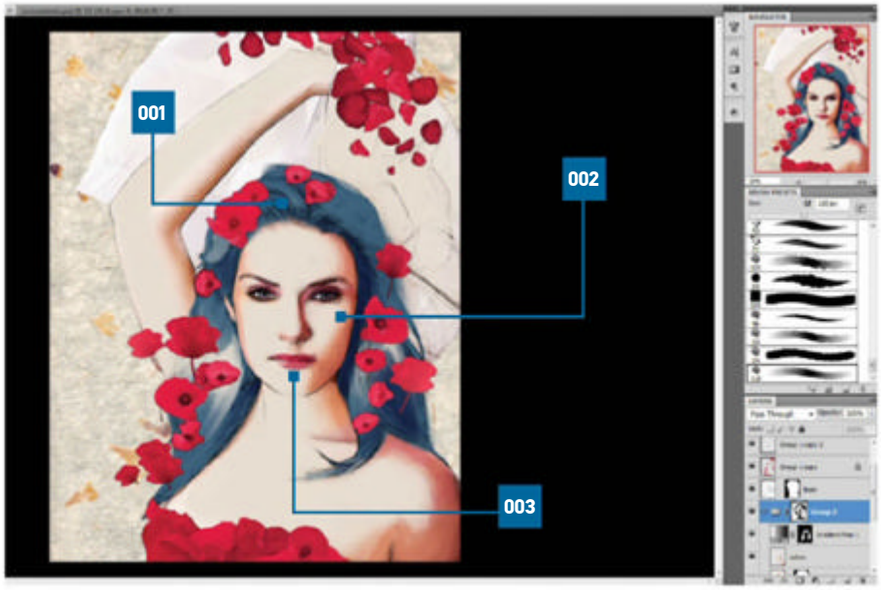
Now it is time to find the edges of our image. Duplicate the woman layer and the flower layers separately. Next for each layer go to, Filter>Stylize>Find Edges, which will turn the layers into coloured lines with a white background. Desaturate these layers as well, and use Levels to clean up excess lines (Image>Adjustments>Levels). To get cleaner lines, bring the White, Grey and Black sliders together in the Levels panel. You can also clean up lines by using the Brush tool.

GET INTO DETAIL

LAY COLOUR AND BRUSH STROKES TO CREATE A PAINTED FEEL

09 START TO COLOUR IN

Time to start colouring in our image. Create a new layer over the woman layer but underneath the line art layer. Using the new reddish colours as a base, brush over the details of her face using the same brush listed earlier. Keep within the lines with her face and skin, but use artistic licence when colouring her hair.



001 | KEEP IT LOOSE
Since the idea is for a watercolour look, keep the brush strokes a bit loose with a textured feel

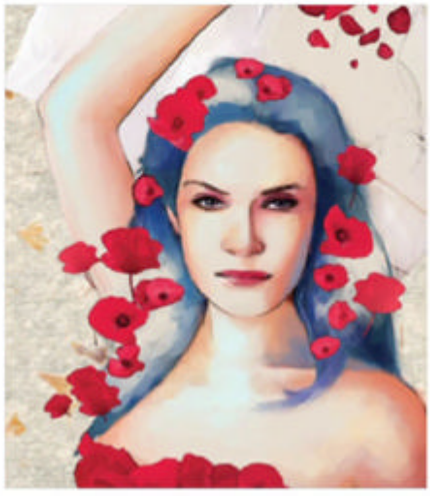
002 | USE REFERENCES
This is a good time to use references of how light and shadow affect a person's face for accurate detail

003 | ADD COLOURS
Start with a single colour for shading, and continuously pull in different colours for shading via Eyedropper (I) or Color Picker

10 ADD IN INTEREST

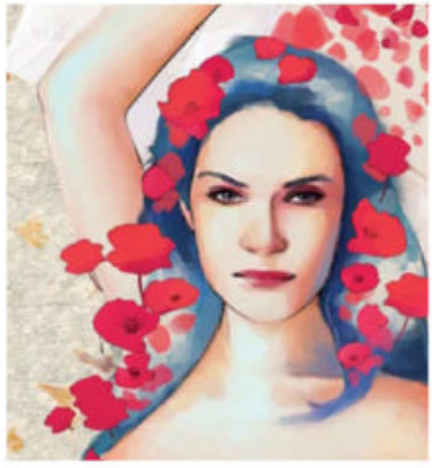
Refine your colouring further. The colouring should ease in well with the image and not look too smooth or jagged. If you are finding it's becoming muddy, try Color Balancing your brush strokes, or try setting your brush setting to Multiply or Overlay. Colouring her hair a few different shades of blue has added more interest to the image. Be sure to keep the strokes relatively loose and layered. Afterwards, mask off the colour layer and creatively mask areas of interest, like where her hair and the flowers intersect.

> "The colouring should ease in well with the image and not look too smooth or jagged"



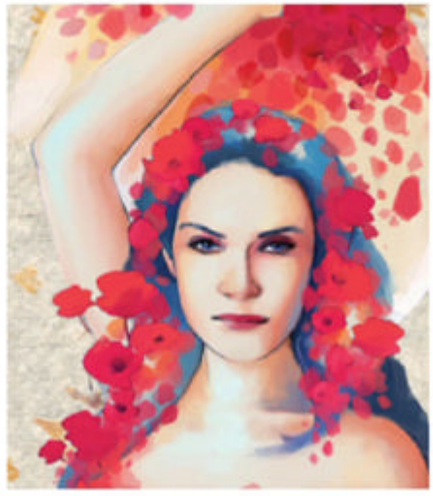
11 ADD EVEN MORE INTEREST

To add further interest, pull in some additional colours. Be sure to have colours that aren't too contrasted and work well with your current palette. In this image the woman has been given a different look compared to the original stock art, mostly by using liberal strokes and flatter shades of colour. Colours from her hair and flowers were also used on her skin to harmonise these elements. When satisfied with your colouring, mask off some of the line art that is no longer needed.



12 START ON THE FLOWERS

Now that the base details for the woman are done, group the related layers into one group. On the flower line art layer, make sure the lines are cleaned up using masks, filters, or erasing. Lock the transparent pixels of the flower layer (located under the Layer Settings in the Layer panel), and brush in a secondary colour. A brighter orange was used to make the flowers pop. Underneath the flowers layer, add a new petals layer. With lower Flow and Transparency settings, create lighter scattered petals.



13 ADD CASCADING PETALS

Continue adding in your petals in various shapes and sizes and create a cascading effect from the foreground flowers. The goal is a loose feel of the petals, but make sure to keep them relatively petal shaped. Make sure they are blending seamlessly with the foreground flowers. To help achieve this, further mask some of the original flower line art and add in the same pop colour. To help with the cascading effect, more loose hair was added to the woman's colour layer.

USE ARTISTIC LICENCE

ADD DETAIL AND KEEP IT LIGHT WHILE ADDING YOUR OWN FLAIR

14 RECOLOUR THE FLOWERS

When turning a photo into an artistic style, it's important to keep each layer separate and make sure they are easily editable. Doing so makes changing entire formats and colour schemes easier to get the desired effect. To demonstrate, the flowers and petals have been switched to a stronger red. Brush in darker pits to the existing flowers and give the background petals more life by masking out their transparency around their edges. Lock the transparent pixels, and use a Gradient to give whole sections of petals an orange hue.

STOCK IMAGES AND TEXTURE

The stock surface texture used in this tutorial is a soft grunge papery texture from w**ww.lostandtaken.com**, a royalty free stock website. There are an innumerable amount of places to find stock images that can suit almost any need. However, make sure when using your stock that you abide by the stock creator's usage requirements and copyrights. Some places offer royalty free, commercial free stock that is free to use anywhere, but some require payment or notation that the stock is being used. Others also require a timed usage licence. Also make sure the stock is a good enough quality and size for easier editing.

15 ADD DEPTH

Mask off the petals and brush strokes that intersect undesirably, like on her arms and some areas of her hair. Duplicate the background petals layer underneath itself and set it to Multiply, giving the petals more depth. Play with the opacity. Next add a new layer below the precedent layer and set it to Multiply also. Brush in smaller, lesser petals, mostly focusing on her hair. Add a new Multiply layer above the flowers layer and repeat, but focusing on the cloth in her hand.

QUICK TIP

Masking is an effective way to delete elements in an image, while still keeping the deleted data just in case. Masks work in black and white; black being what is being erased and white is what is visible. Filters and brush effects can be applied to masks, an advantage over erasing.

17 ADDING FINER DETAILS

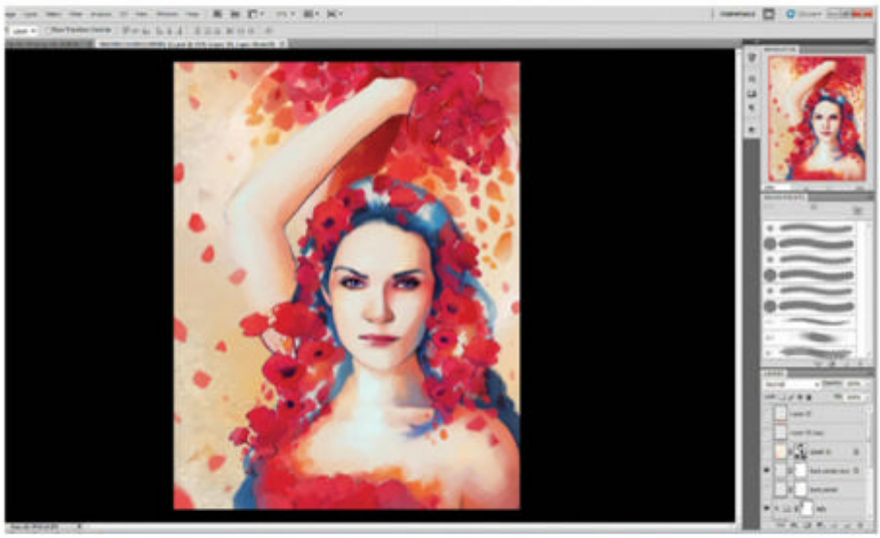
Now that the flowers have been completed, group all of the layers involved. Keep these layers separate for any future editing. Looking back, some sections of the woman can be adjusted to match the flowers. Remove or add some of the line art to your liking and use Color Balance if necessary. A clear contrast needs to be made between the woman and flowers, but at the same time it must look harmonious. Add in small details such as highlights to her eyes, hair and lips.

16 ADD IN HIGHLIGHTS

Create a new layer over the flower line art layer, and pick a light, relatively neutral colour that fits in with the art. With the watercolour brush, add in small highlights to the petals. Brush the highlights on random petals and keep them sharp, but keep in mind the light sources of the art so the highlights don't conflict. Using a small, splotchy brush, add splashes of red to the sides of some flowers. Add some splashes to her hair also.

18 SIMPLIFY THE BACKGROUND

Next is to simplify the background. It needs to match the feel of the art. First, sort the woman and flowers into a single group and attach a blank mask. Very lightly mask the edges of the ground to blend with the background. On a layer above the background, use the Soft Round brush with Transfer on and pick a matching neutral colour. Lightly colour around the woman and flowers. Keep the edges textured. With the watercolour brush, pick a red from the flowers and loosely colour around them.



19 ADD ADDITIONAL PETALS

With the Soft Round brush, mask any extra brush strokes that cover too much of the textured background. Make sure the added colour feels neither too smooth or too jagged. The left side of the art feels too open and plain, so add in some petals for decoration. Make a new layer above all of your pre-existing layers, and brush in some smaller petals on both sides of the woman. Make them spaced out and very few, as the focus must remain on the woman and original flower petals.

QUICK TIP

Three tools that come in handy when recolouring are the Color Balance, Hue/Saturation and the Replace Color (Image>Adjustments>Replace Color) tools. With Color Balance and Hue/Saturation, you can recolour an entire image. With the Replace Color tool, you can select and recolour a single or multiple shades in an image.

20 REFINE ADDITIONAL PETALS

The newly added petals should help box in and bring focus to the woman's face. Use the Lasso tool (L) if needs be to rearrange each petal. Using previous methods of masking and brush strokes, soften the edges of these petals and bring in aesthetic colours such as a bright orange and deep red to match the art. Keep these petals less defined and softer than the original petals. Make sure they do not cover too much of the background or original art details.

21 ADD A SURFACE TEXTURE

At this point of the tutorial, a paper texture is needed to tie the whole image together. Create or find a stock paper texture that has varying shades, but isn't too dirty or repetitive. Bring in your texture over every pre-existing layer. Desaturate it and use Levels to make it mostly white with soft grey shades. Next, use the Gradient tool and set its settings to Overlay. Overlay a limited number of previous colours from the art at randomised places.

22 COLOUR THE SURFACE TEXTURE

On this texture layer, attach a blank mask. Using the watercolour brush, mask out areas of the texture, revealing the art underneath. Focus on masking around her face and flower petals and start with multiple light strokes. Try not to keep the strokes too uniform; the texture needs to look diverse. Set the texture layer to Multiply and Opacity at 80%. Once applied, the texture should blend with the art, and give it a slightly darker tint. Apply the Sharpen filter (Filter>Sharpen).

23 ADD AMBIANCE WITH COLOUR

Next, add some overall ambiance to the art. Create a new layer. Again using the Gradient tool, select a greyish-red colour and make a Linear Gradient from the bottom to a quarter up the image. Set this gradient to Multiply. If needed, resize the gradient to be further up or lower on the art (Edit>Transform>Scale). Duplicate the gradient, flip it vertically (Edit>Transform>Flip Vertical) and place it at the top of the art.

24 FINISHING TOUCHES

On another layer, place different coloured Radial Gradients on different parts of the art, such as near the edges and around the flower petals. Check your work for any details that have been missed or need to be added. Next, select the entire document (Select>All), copy it (Edit>Copy Merged) and paste it as a new layer. The art should all be on this one layer with the original layers underneath. Apply another Sharpen filter and use Color Balance to bring in a bit of blue tint.

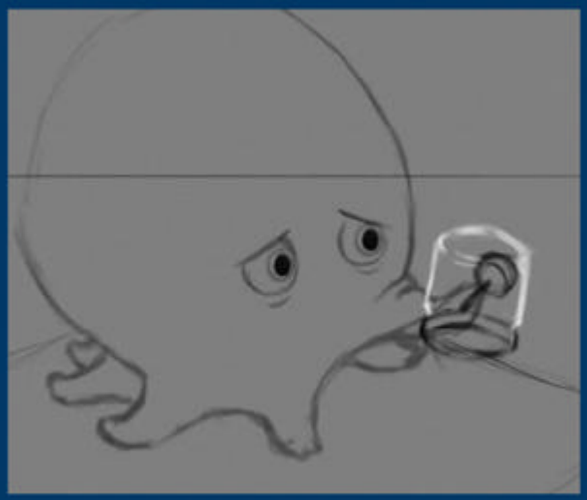
LOLLIPOP
ANDREW MCINTOSH

HOW ANDREW MCINTOSH USED SOME REFLECTIVE TRICKS TO PAINT AN OCTOPUS LOOKING FOR A TASTY TREAT

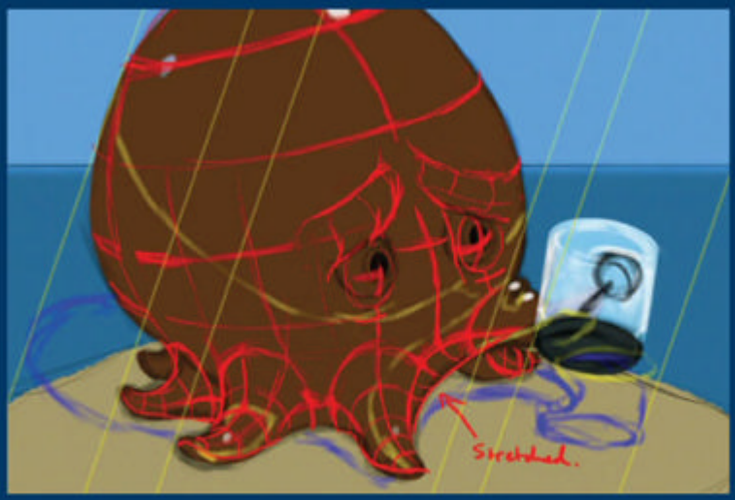
© Andrew McIntosh

Australian artist Andrew McIntosh (**andrewmcintoshart.deviantart.com**) says, "I have a fondness for the whimsical... It inspires my design process and I feel more relaxed creating something that puts a smile on my face. Lollipop... Popped into my head while walking the dog. I thought it would be cute to have an octopus who had found some treasure that they could not get at."

He produces artwork for games by day – "my paintings are my hobby and creative outlet" – but always challenges himself to try a new idea or technique, and Lollipop is no exception. "There is always something in each piece that I have not experienced or want to try [to be] better at. This particular one was the reflection. There is a single reflection layer where I painted in the colours from the surrounding environment onto the octopus as if it were a shiny metal sphere."



01 | INITIAL SKETCH
The preliminary sketch is always kept rough to allow for larger changes to shape and composition later.



02 | REFINE THE DETAILS
Lighting is a very big factor for me when painting and so I try to work out the direction of the lights and shadows as soon as possible.

> "There is always something in each piece that I have not experienced or want to try [to be] better at"

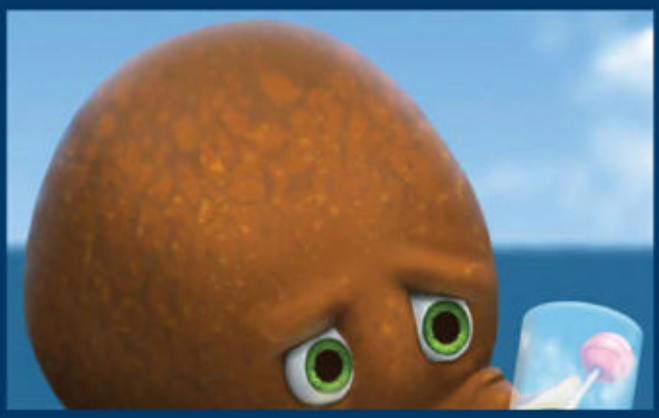
03 | ADD THE BASE COLOURS
I prefer to keep my colour layers separate as it allows for adjustments throughout the process without affecting the lights.

04 BASIC LIGHTS AND DARKS

I always start with a basic light and dark layer to help settle the form. This helps to bring it out.

05 AMBIENT AND REFLECTED LIGHT

These, I find, help to set the subject in the scene more. Also an occlusion (sometimes done on the darks layer) helps to set characters and items against each other more believably.

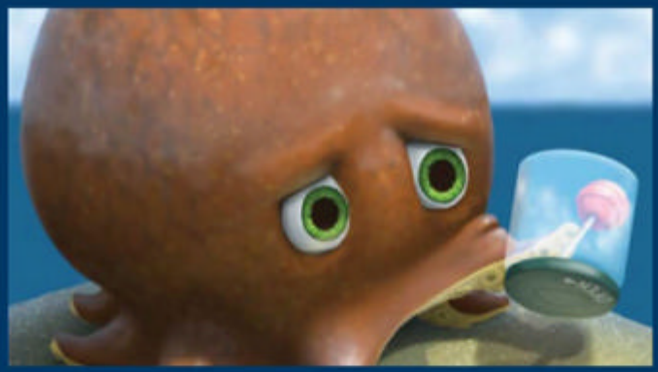


06 UNIQUE STEP, REFLECTION MAP

This was the first time I attempted this and tried many versions. I found painting it as its own diffuse layer first helped to work out the exact bends in the reflected light.

07 APPLYING REFLECTION

The reflection map is blended over the surface of the octopus and the opacity is reduced to create a subtle and believable reflection.



08 FINAL LAYERS

This is typically the final look of my layers at the end of a painting (not including background and additional props). There is often also a Post Effects folder that includes global light effects, light balance and colour balance layers) This painting did not have those.

REFLECTION MAPS

WHAT IS A REFLECTION MAP AND HOW DO THEY WORK?

A reflection map is basically a texture in your document that maps reflections of the environment around the reflective object. They can be rendered in 3D using environment-mapping techniques, which will produce the most accurate results. When a reflection map is incorrect it affects the entire image.

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USE CLIPPING MASKS CREATIVELY

UTILISE CLIPPING MASKS AND BLENDING MODES TO COMPLETE A PAINTERLY ILLUSTRATION

Inspired by current trends in design and apparel featuring galaxy and nebula imagery, this tutorial will show you how to incorporate Photoshop's fantastic tools and effects in digital painting to create an otherworldy piece of artwork.

Using clipping or layer masks, various effects, vector tools, and blending modes within Photoshop can not only speed up the creation of a fantastic digital painting, but also brings something new to the design that may have been avoided due to tedium, or not have been executed as well if done manually. Photoshop is a powerful tool, and using it to its fullest is a great way to expand your skillset and get your artwork to a higher level.

In this tutorial, we'll use clipping masks to complement a painterly design. We'll start off drawing a sketch of the portrait and establish our composition. Then, we'll refine our line artwork, paint and render our subject's face and body using default and edited brushes. Last of all, we'll use stock images to create a nebulous hair design. Using clipping masks and blending modes within our layers allows our elements to remain editable as we apply non-destructive changes.

OUR EXPERT

MARY WINKLER
www.behance.net/acrylicana
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Mary works as an illustrator and graphic designer under the brand Acrylicana® designing apparel, jewellery, and illustrating for companies like Disney Consumer Products, Jakks Pacific, Jada Toys, Tuts+, and more.

SOURCE FILES

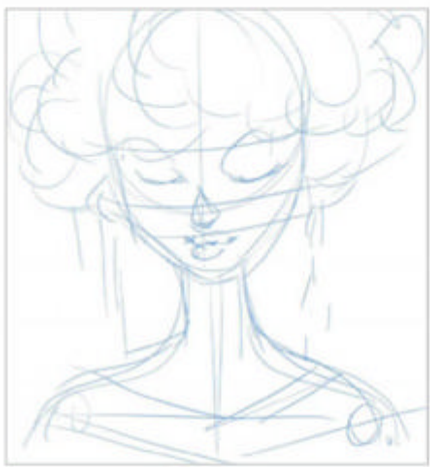
Included are two line art sketches. You can download the stock images used from **www.dreamstime.com**, image numbers 11693269, 25682422 and 31634656.

PREPARING THE BASE

CREATE SKETCHES AND LINE ART AND PREPARE YOUR STOCK

01 PREPARE THE SKETCH

Open a new document in Adobe Photoshop and create a new layer in the Layers panel. We're going to start with a simple, rough compositional sketch. Use the Brush tool (B) and a Default brush of your choice to sketch out a portrait similar to the one pictured. Use reference if it helps with your design.



02 REFINE THE LINE ART

Create a new layer in the Layers panel and use the Pen tool and Ellipse tool in order to better define the shape of the head and jaw. On another new layer refine your original sketch. This may take a few layers of progressively cleaner line art. Once satisfied with your work, merge (Cmd/Ctrl+E) your final line art layers together.

03 PLACE THE BIRDS

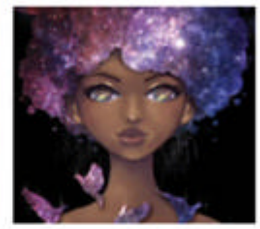
Use the bird silhouette stock photo to copy and paste birds onto new layers over others. Use the Lasso tool to select the area around each bird when copying them into your working document. Use the Magic Wand tool to delete the background of the birds. Collect layers into folders in the Layers panel to keep yourself organised.

WORK IN PROGRESS

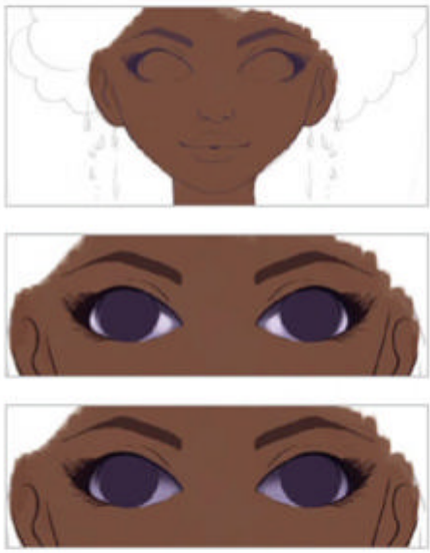
FROM CONCEPTION TO COMPLETION

Progress 1: Prepare the sketch

Progress 2: Render the face



Progress 3: Drawing and rendering the portrait with the Brush tool



04 ADD SOME FLAT COLOURS

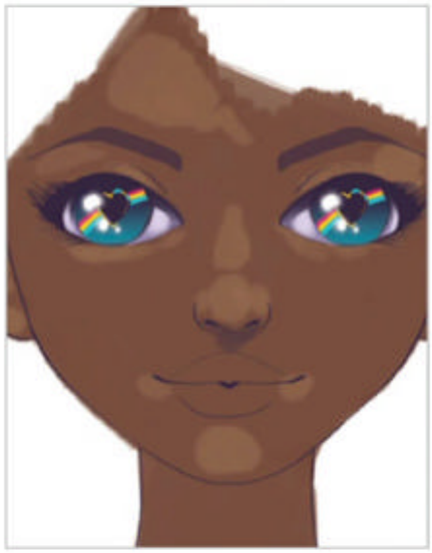
Under the line art layer, use the Brush tool, set to a default Hard brush, to fill in your portrait's skin tone. We're going to use various brown tones for this design, but you can deviate from any of the presented colour palette if it works better with your overall design. On a new layer, colour in the eyes with shades of grey-violet. Later we'll use a clipping mask in order to add stock images to each eye rather than rendering the irises manually.

QUICK TIP

So far we've used Hard brushes. Now that we're on the rendering section of this design, use softer brushes with modified Opacity and Flow in order to blend the pixels while painting on each layer. This brush type works well on the cheeks and to blend shadows around the jaw.

07 USE GAUSSIAN BLUR

Next we'll go to Filter>Blur>Gaussian Blur to apply a smooth Gaussian blur. The radius applied to the layer will depend on the size of your document. We're going to apply a radius of 16.9 pixels so the highlights and shadows blend together without extending too far beyond the face within the design. Hit OK and use the Eraser tool to erase the blur effect from outside of the face. This will keep your design and background clean.

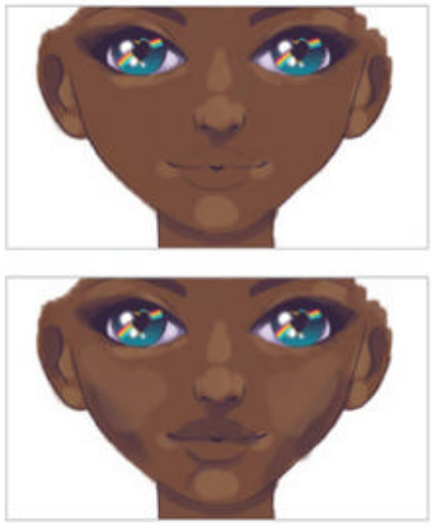


05 HIGHLIGHT THE FACE

We'll draw highlights onto the face on a layer above the skin tone layer. Using a Smooth Hard brush, map out areas of the face that would be hit by light first. Consider the nose, chin, part of the forehead, beneath the eyebrows, and the sides of the mouth as areas to highlight. Use a light brown a few shades lighter than the base skin tone rather than white for this step. We'll add bright hot spots to the design later.

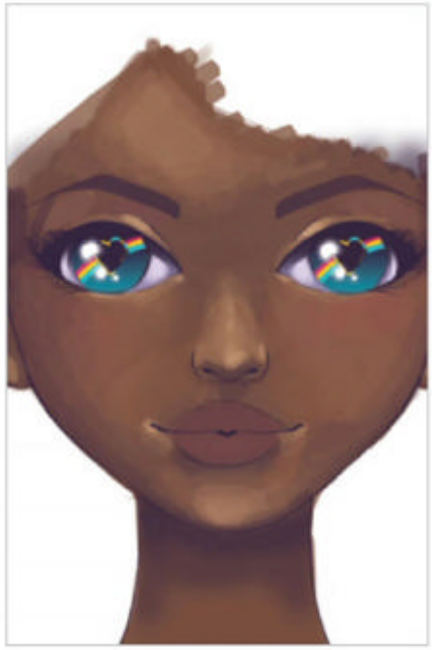
08 PAINT THE FACE

Create a new layer above the blurred layer and continue building up values in the same manner as was done before. Vary the opacity of your brush and consider using textured brushes in order for the skin to look more painterly rather than as if it's been cel-shaded like a cartoon. You can also use the Blur tool to blend pixels in smaller areas of the portrait rather than blurring an entire layer. Add mauve-coloured blush to the cheeks and warm brown for the lips.



06 SHADE THE FACE

For the shadows, we'll use a brown that's a few shades darker than the skin tone. Paint it into areas where facial features are overlapping and casting shadows onto other parts of the face. Consider under the nose, inside the ear, on the outer edges of the upper eyes, and under the chin to be areas cast in shadow. Reduce the opacity of your brush while painting shadow shapes in order to build the value up. You may also change the lighting completely if you feel it benefits your composition.

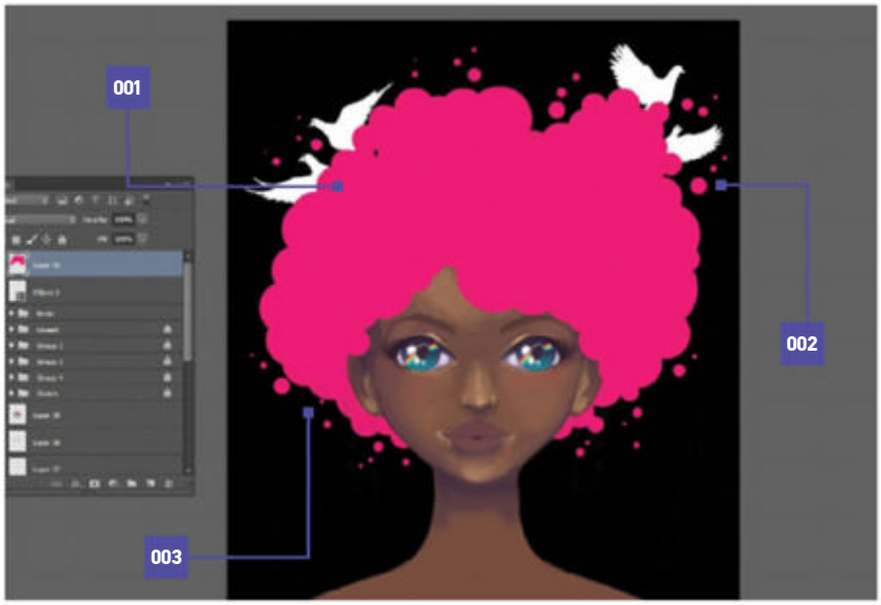


WORK UP THE COMPOSITION

ADDING HAIR, BIRDS, AND ASSORTED FANTASTICAL DETAILS TO THE DESIGN

09 MAKE CLOUDY HAIR

On a new layer, we'll build the hair. Our subject's hair is fluffy and cloud-like. In order to create it you'll need to overlap ellipses with the Ellipse tool. Hold down the Shift key while drawing your ellipses in order to create a singular mass. Fill the shapes in with a bright, easy to see colour in the Properties panel.



001 | BIRDS STAND OUT
Use the Paint Bucket tool to change each bird silhouette's colour to something bright and noticeable against the black background

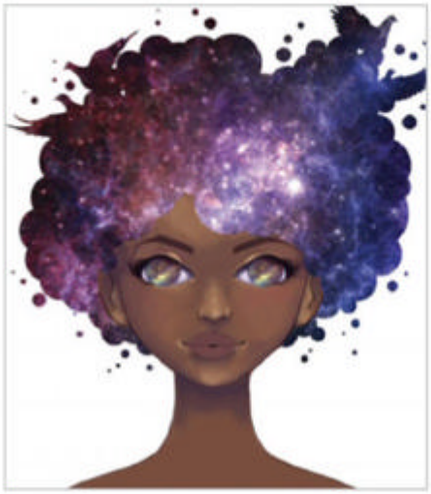
002 | BUBBLY HAIR
Add smaller ellipses around the hair and birds so the hair looks bubbly and fantastical. Take advantage of negative space

003 | DRAWING BEHIND THE HEAD
The hair behind the head, neck, and ears is on a new layer underneath the rest of the design's content

10 CLIPPING MASK THE HAIR

Import one of the galaxy stock images listed on p63 to your document. Place it above the filled-in hair layer in the Layers panel. With the galaxy layer selected, go to Layer>Create Clipping Mask (Cmd/Ctrl+alt+G) to clip that layer to the one below it. Now we have fantastic galaxy hair! Note that you can use the Move tool to change what portion of the galaxy image appears within the boundaries of the hair so long as you're only moving the galaxy layer.

> "Clipping masks applied to a layer above a folder will clip to the folder's contents"

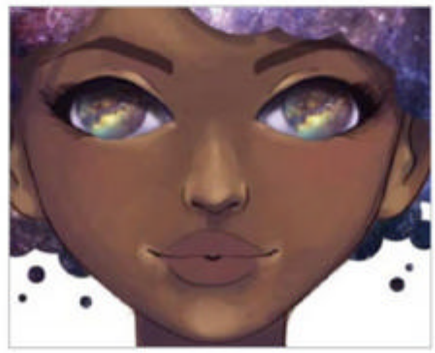


11 MASK OTHER ELEMENTS

Repeat the previous step of applying a clipping mask to the portion of hair in the layer behind the back of the head. You can either adjust the stock image so both galaxy layers line up or you can choose a darker portion of the stock image to give the illusion of depth within the hair. Then, you'll do the same thing to the bird silhouette folder and the eyes. Clipping masks applied to a layer above a folder will clip to the folder's contents.

12 SHADE UNDER THE HAIR

On a new layer underneath the base hair layer, paint brown and dark brown to give the illusion of the galaxy cloud casting a shadow onto our subject's forehead. When you reduce the Opacity of the brush to 40% and the Flow to 60% you can build up the value slowly and use a softer brush to blend those shadows in together. Follow the direction of the shadows we created earlier in the tutorial to remain consistent within our design.



13 SHADE THE EYES

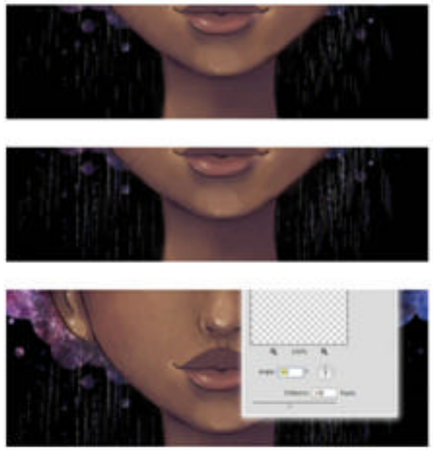
Direct your attention to the eyes. On a new layer, use the same dark purple or dark brown we used in creating the line art to shade the eyes. Reduce the Opacity of your Soft brush to 20% and build the shadows up organically to create depth within the face as well as soften the look of the eyes themselves. We're not going to add any more detail to the eyes than this, since the second galaxy stock image is detailed enough.

BRING IT ALL TOGETHER

FINALISING THE DESIGN AND FOCUSING ON COMPOSITIONAL DETAILS TO TIE EVERYTHING TOGETHER

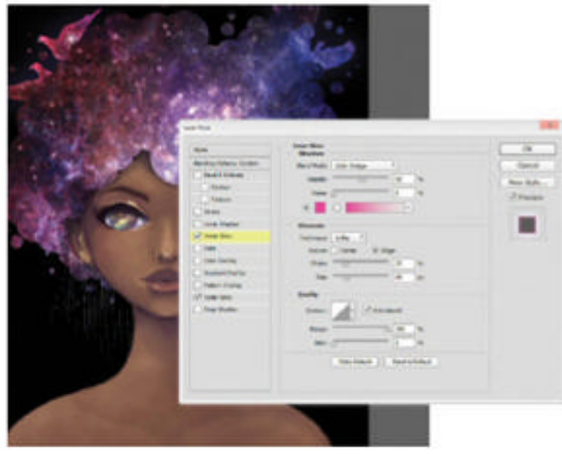
14 COMPLETE THE PORTRAIT

Next we'll finalise the portrait on a new layer above the rest. Smooth out the values on the face, add additional highlights to the eyelids, and deepen the shadows being cast by the hair. Move down from the face to the neck and shoulders. Add shadow and subtle highlights with a soft, transparent default brush. Switch to a Chalk or Scatter style brush to add texture to the skin on the face and body. Doing so gives the portrait a slightly realistic touch.



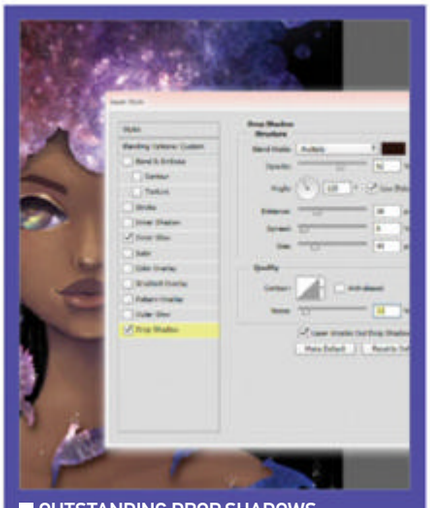
15 CREATE THE RAIN

Now we'll work on some fun details within the rest of the design. Notice how our subject's galaxy cloud is raining in the final image. To make the rain effect use a very small one to four point Round brush and draw a series of dots around the bottom of the hair on a new layer. Go to Filter>Blur>Motion Blur and apply a Distance of 156 pixels at a 90° Angle. Duplicate the layer, repeat, and set the Opacity of the second layer to 41%.



16 ADD RIM LIGHTING

In the Layers panel, select the bird folder, right-click, and hit Blending Options. Choose the Inner Glow option to create a rim lighting effect. Set the blend mode to Color Dodge, Opacity to 53%, and the Color to pink or blue. Set the Technique to Softer, Source to Edge, Choke to 22% and the Size to 49%. The other settings are all at their default. You may find that you adjust these settings to work better with your composition and colour palette.

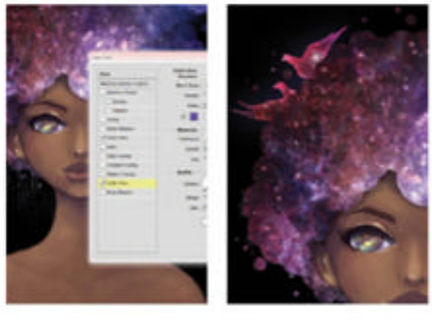


OUTSTANDING DROP SHADOWS

To get elements like the birds or hair to pop out from the figure, consider adding a drop shadow as the blending option. Such an effect was applied to the second folder of birds that are flying around the figure's neck. Set the blend mode to Multiply, Opacity to 60-65%, and the Angle to 120-degrees. Set the Distance to 28 px, the Spread to 8%, and the Size to 49 px. Finally, if you set the Noise to 11% or so, texture will be added to the drop shadow, which goes well with the painterly style of this design.

QUICK TIP

Most of the time we spent rendering the face was beneath the line art layers. If you paint details over the line art layer you can get a more painterly look compared to a cartoony look. The final design that we have created is a mix of the two styles.



17 CREATE AN OUTER GLOW

Once again, select the bird folder in the Layers panel, Cmd/right-click, and hit Blending Options. Choose Outer Glow this time. Under Structure set the blend mode to Color Dodge, Opacity to 56%, and the Color to indigo or purple. Under Elements set the Technique to Softer, Spread to 7%, and Size to 250 px. Finally, in the Quality section, set the Range to 73% and the Jitter to 0%. This and the previous step help the birds pop out from the dark background.

18 ADD ADDITIONAL BIRDS

Add additional birds as a sort of necklace or shoulder decoration in order to fill in the composition and finalise the image. Like the other bird folder, make sure each bird silhouette is cut out from its background and a galaxy stock image is clipped to the folder itself. Draw sparkles, highlights, and raindrops with a Small Round brush as was done with the rain effect earlier in this tutorial. Perhaps the rain's colours mimic those from the galaxy images themselves.

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20 TIPS FOR BETTER ILLUSTRATIONS

PROFESSIONAL DIGITAL ARTISTS AND ILLUSTRATORS SHARE THEIR ESSENTIAL ADVICE FOR IMPROVING YOUR ILLUSTRATION TECHNIQUES AND EXPLAIN HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF A RANGE OF KEY PHOTOSHOP TOOLS

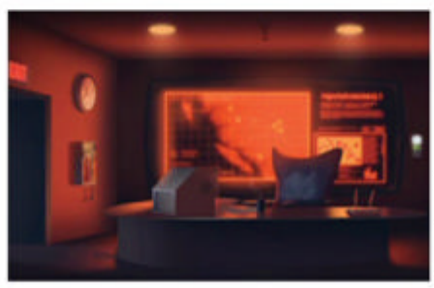
01. ADJUST COLOR DYNAMICS AND TEXTURE

Graphic designer and illustrator Shaivalini Kumar (**www.behance.net/shaivalini**) talks us through the key Photoshop tools used in this fantastic image.

© Shaivalini Kumar

02. USE GRADIENT MAPS

Aaron Campbell (**www.aaroncampbell.ca**) is a designer and illustrator based in Vancouver, DC. For him, gradients are an important part of his illustration process. "I almost always start with a very rough sketch. I like leaving my sketches a bit on the vague side so that there's lots of room for experimenting and changing things when I get into Photoshop. Quickly brushing in some black and white for values is a very easy way of establishing your lighting early on in the piece, so there's no confusion once you start painting the final. I then draw out a perspective grid and start Pen-tooling in the largest blocks of colour. Once most of the parts are blocked in, I begin adding in the lighting, starting with the largest areas and the main focal point. I also like to add some Gradient Maps over the top of the whole piece to add harmony to the whole colour palette. I like mixing it up between multiple Gradient Maps on different blending modes and opacities since it can give some very unexpected results."



© Aaron Campbell

© Aaron Campbell

03. TAKE CONTROL OF PATHS WITH THE PEN TOOL

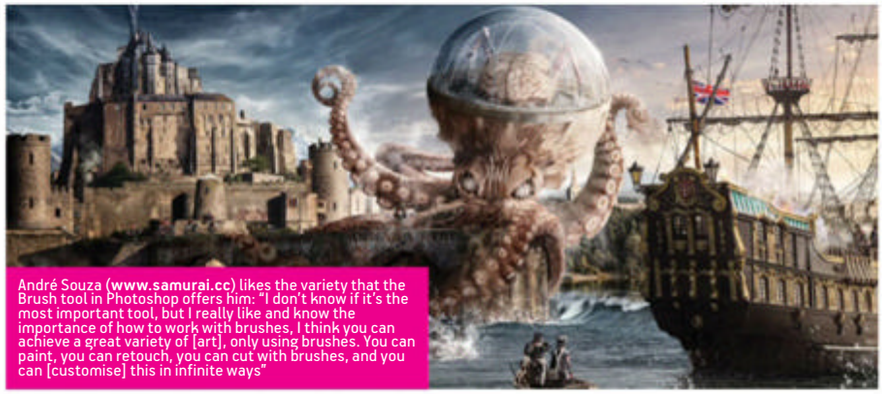
Aaron Campbell (**www.aaroncampbell.ca**) explains how to get the most out of this essential Photoshop tool: "I use the Pen tool in Path mode instead of Shape mode, therefore for my shapes and lines I use Fill Path or Stroke Path instead of having separate shape layers. I like working this way since it makes it easier to edit the shape in almost any way and paint over the top of them or use the Pen tool's Make Selection function to minus off any part of the shape. Since I often do my illustrations as paintings, I find having rasterised blocks of colour makes it easy to paint other colours into the shape, erase parts and merge other shapes together. If they took away every tool in Photoshop and only left in the Pen tool, I could still create a full piece with no problem since it offers so much variety in just one tool."

© Giulio Rossi

04. DRAW SHAPES WITH THE PEN TOOL

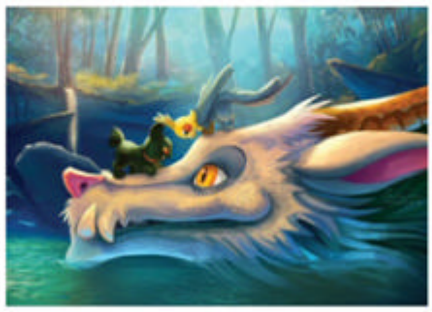
Giulio Rossi (**www.behance.net/giuliorossi**) is a self-taught illustrator. His designs are clean and sharp, often introducing quirky characters with lots of expression. For him, the Photoshop Pen tool is essential to his workflow. In fact, it is one of the key tools that he uses in designing his stylised work, mainly for creating vector shapes within his illustrations. "I use the Pen tool to create the basic shapes of my illustrations. Starting from the initial sketch, I trace the edges of the elements I want to keep separated from the rest so I can work directly on them with the brushes. It helps me to be more clean and precise, which is something I really enjoy when I include geometric shapes into my portraits."

05. CREATE AND CUSTOMISE PHOTOSHOP BRUSHES



© André Souza

André Souza (**www.samurai.cc**) likes the variety that the Brush tool in Photoshop offers him: "I don't know if it's the most important tool, but I really like and know the importance of how to work with brushes, I think you can achieve a great variety of [art], only using brushes. You can paint, you can retouch, you can cut with brushes, and you can [customise] this in infinite ways"

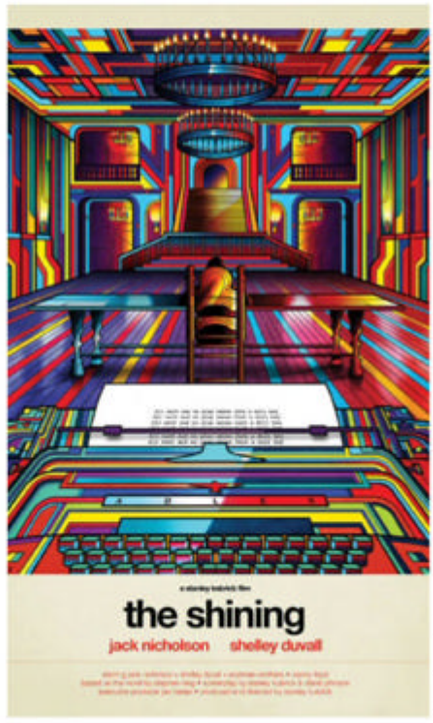


© Eric Proctor

Eric Proctor (**tsaoshin.deviantart.com**) is also a fan of the brushes in Photoshop, especially custom tips: "Being able to set and adjust various brush parameters such as scatter, opacity and linking actions to tablet pressure gives me the control I need to create a brush set that emulates traditional methods. My library for brushes includes custom brush tip sets to help me automate tedious tasks like creating blades of grass, texture on rocks and strands of hair."

© Fredy Santiago

Fredy Santiago (**www.imsugarcoated.com**) uses Photoshop's brushes to add texture to his art: "The way I use the paintbrush is mostly to control textures that I want in certain areas; it gives me the opportunity to display contrast within the image. The Brush tool has also allowed me to use different tricks with it, like experimenting with opacity, Flow, brush assets and [variable] options. From time to time I create my own brushes; I am a big fan of graphite-like texture brushes and watercolour ones."



© Van Orton Design

Marco and Stefano of Van Orton Design (**www.vanortondesign.com**) also rave about the importance of brushes when it comes to delivering their electric designs: "Perhaps the answer will be trivial, but for us the most important tool is just the brush and a good tablet, absolutely essential for the success of some phases of our work. Also a good use of black marks and appropriate selections complete the work in the right way."

06. USE PHOTOSHOP WITH OTHER SOFTWARE

Many illustrators use other programs, such as Adobe Illustrator, 3D software and painting programs, but Photoshop has a key role to play in these workflows. For Shaivalini Kumar (**www.behance.net/shaivalini**), Photoshop is an essential component in getting the illustrations to completion: "Being a graphic designer, I use Adobe Illustrator a lot. But for all my illustration work, I use Photoshop, as it gives me more control over my rendering. I often create my base shapes in vector format in Illustrator, and then texture them and give them highlights in Photoshop. A lot of my illustrations require the use of the Airbrush, Dry brushes, Watercolour brushes, etc, therefore my final compositing for my illustrations is done in Photoshop.

"What Photoshop also allows me to do is use pressure sensitivity while drawing, therefore giving me maximum control over my strokes. I am also heavily into typography and editorial design. Photoshop, therefore, is the best place for me to create hyper-realistic mockups. It helps me in presenting my work in the best manner. The action-coded layers in Photoshop mockups make it very easy to use them. For me, Photoshop is a complete package [and in] using [it] I can create my artwork and deliver it in the best way possible too."

© Shaivalini Kumar

07. A DIGITAL ARTIST'S TOP TOOLS

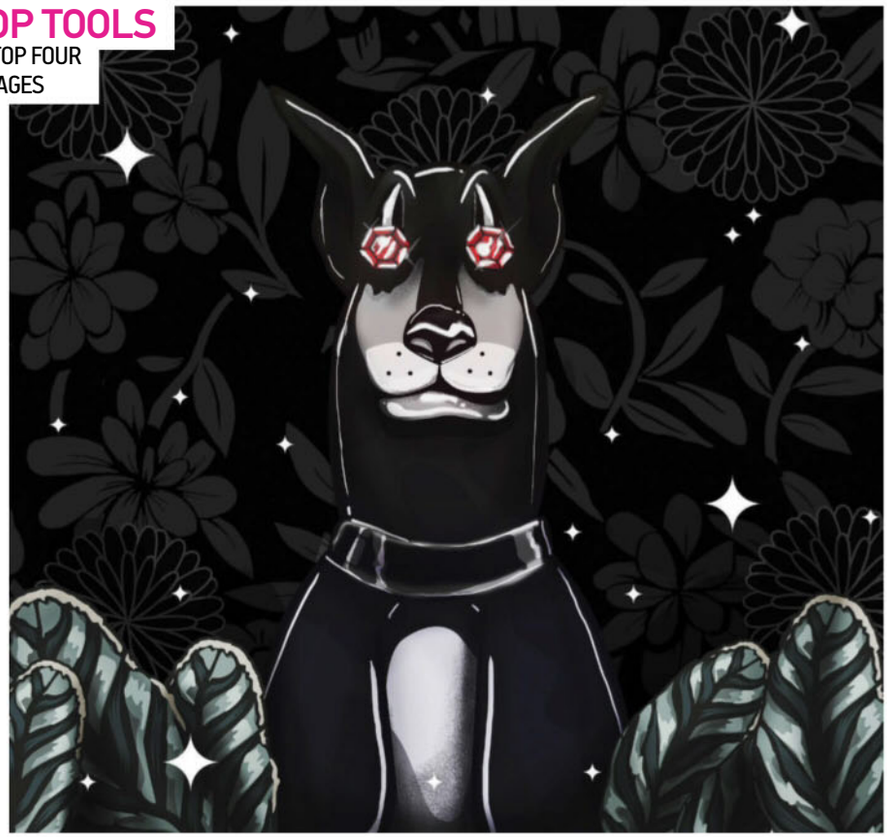
DIGITAL ARTIST FREDY SANTIAGO SHARES THE TOP FOUR TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES THAT MAKE UP HIS IMAGES

Texture: I often use the Brush tool with texture and apply it into surfaces to make things a little more lively

Gradients: The Gradient tool helps me bring depth and interesting colour shifts in areas that I select

Paintbrush: The Paintbrush is a master tool when it comes to adding highlights in illustrations

Burn tool: The Burn tool gives the final touches when giving objects more volume



© Sugar Coated

© Van Orton Design

08. BRING IN ELECTRIC COLOURS

Van Orton (**www.vanortondesign.com**) is comprised of twins Marco and Stefano from Italy, working as illustrators and designers. Their work is distinctive thanks to their use of electric, popping colours, which are retro but utterly modern at the same time. How can you add a touch of the electric to your own illustrations? You have to go back to the Eighties, say the duo. "We are very inspired by the graphics and illustrations of the Eighties and Nineties. In those years, these electric colours were used everywhere. For our work we really like to start from two or three main colours and add more and fill the palette evenly. Also, the use of pattern and texture in pop-art style is critical to finish the work."

© Emi Haze

09. COLOUR CONTROL AND SELECTIONS

Emi Haze (**www.emihaze.com**) explains how Photoshop's staple tools are essential to good illustrations: "I use blending modes – Multiply, Overlay, Soft Light – to obtain peculiar effects in the combination of different layers and textures, for instance the double exposures. The blending allows me to combine different elements, colours and images in a single work, creating shape and colour compositions beyond imagination.

"Colour is an element of primary importance for the final perception of the artwork. Thanks to the application of colour adjustments to every single layer – like Curves, Levels, Hue/Saturation, Selective Color – I have complete control over the colour throughout every phase of my work.

"Finally, I can't forget the Selection tools. There are a multitude of techniques to obtain a good selection: from a bitmap or vector mask, the Color Range tool, selecting with colour channels or, especially when working with a [graphics tablet], the fastest way to be precise is using the Lasso and Pen tool."

10. USE REFERENCES FOR EVERYTHING

André Souza (**www.samurai.cc**) is the partner and director for Samurai.cc, a creative content company. He suggests that up-and-coming illustrators looking for a way to better their work and break into the industry simply take the time to look at the world around them and find inspiration: "What I would like to say to them is: always look. Always observe the world around you: the people, the nature and the animals, the way they move, talk and act. You will always find wonderful references in this. Listen to good music, keep the habit of watching movies, reading books and comics, play a lot of videogames – never underestimate the power of pop culture. And draw, if you like it, a lot. [In conclusion], be a good observer."

© André Souza

11. WORK WITH TONAL VALUES

ANNA WARDLE TALKS US THROUGH THE CREATION OF HER GEISHA CREATION, WHICH DEVELOPS FROM MONOCHROME VALUES TO FULL-COLOUR MASTERPIECE

01 | MONOCHROME VALUES

"I normally start off in black-and-white. This helps with contrasts in lighting, especially if you tend to get distracted by colour. I make a dark silhouette to set a great base to build on. I always use a reference, as this is really important."

02 | TONES AND LIGHTING

"Next, I [start to] build in my tones and lighting roughly with a mixture of textured brushes, trying to keep loose. Then bit by bit it all comes together and you start to see the image forming."

03 | COLOUR AND DETAIL

"A Color layer helps to add colour without losing any of the painting foundations already laid down by working in black-and-white. I slowly work on top using a Normal layer, adding more colour and details to make the piece stand out as much as I can."

© Anna Wardle

12. KEEP AN INSPIRATION FOLDER

Anna Lisa Wardle's (**www.annaillustrations.wordpress.com**) work often encompasses fashion illustration, which requires finding inspiration and influence to create designs. She explains how to find this in everyday life: "Inspiration for any creative individual is everywhere. It's in cultures, fashion and people. You just have to indulge yourself. As an artist, I try and keep many influences and dedicate as much time into staying amazed by the arts as I can. This only makes me want to work more. I have folders full of artists' work on my computer and plaster their work on walls surrounding my desk as a constant inspiration. I have always loved manga and oriental styles; they have always been my main inspirations. However, I also find Renaissance paintings, photography and fashion to be key influences too. There are countless artists I love to spend hours researching: Lois Van Baarle, Audrey Kawasaki, Amy Sol and Soeymilky to name a few! My advice would be not to give up on your work if you feel like you've hit a wall with your image. It's a horrible feeling, so searching the web, magazines or various art books for new artists always helps to spark my interest [again]."

© Anna Wardle

© Giulio Rossi

13. COMBINE REAL MEDIA AND DIGITAL DRAWING

Illustrator and graphic designer Giulio Rossi (**www.behance.net/giuliorossi**) came from a traditional painting background and shares how he made the change to digital: "Since I bought my first graphics tablet, I [have] discovered a whole new way to express my creativity! I always thought that traditional and digital methods were so different from each other, so when I started creating things with my computer I didn't try to replicate what I used to do before. I preferred to test my ability to draw, working with the great potential that a digital environment could offer. Of course, all the practice I've had with traditional art techniques was pretty valuable, and even if I draw with my computer most of the time, I [have] never quit doing it the old-fashioned way. Digital painting has a different approach to drawing and it's all about the fact that you can work with several layers for just one illustration, which is an advantage over traditional art."

14. 8 STEPS TO AMAZING ILLUSTRATIONS

TIM HASTINGS WALKS US THROUGH THE PROCESS OF DESIGNING AN AMAZING ILLUSTRATION IN PHOTOSHOP

Composition: "You are ready to begin sketching. During the composition-sketching phase, keep your sketching loose and try to create as many different variations as possible of your concept. Allowing yourself many options will increase your chances of creating something better than if you were to fixate on one single idea"

Flip your view: "When sketching your compositions, always flip your canvas (Image>Mode>Image Rotation>Flip Canvas Horizontally) to see proportional errors, and other things you might have missed by viewing the piece in only one direction. If you are sketching non-digitally, the same technique can be applied by simply turning the paper upside down and viewing it from that angle"

Creating inking brush settings: "I get asked a lot about the Photoshop brush settings I use. In truth, the settings I use are very basic in comparison to what Photoshop can really do. My brush settings mimic that of an ink and brush technique, or a pen drawing style. I use the Default Circle brush with 1px Spacing and 100% Hardness along with only the Shape Dynamics checked and set to Pen Pressure."

Explore different colour palettes: "After your final art is complete, you should always explore other colour options. One easy way to do this is to Image>Duplicate>Merge, then Cmd/Ctrl+U to bring up the Hue/Saturation menu. Sliding the Hue slider will allow you to see almost every other colour set within the same Hue family. Sliding the Saturation slider will also allow for more colour variation, along with the Brightness slider."

Conceptual planning: "The prequel to the sketch, conceptual planning is a definite must for creating better illustrations no matter what skill level you are at. This means figuring out what you want your piece to say. Combining a concept or message with your art will not only improve the outcome, but in general allow your audience to connect to it."

Colour is everything: "Along with conceptual planning, colour is key in what you want your piece to say. Every colour has its own meaning and can change the mood of the illustration instantly. Limiting your colour palette creates dramatic emphasis and will allow the illustration to become more sophisticated. A good formula to use is a neutral colour and two complementary colours within the same hue."

Create colour sets: "Create a Photoshop document with vast colour sets ranging from two to eight or more colours. Creating premade, limited-palette colour sets on a separate PSD will give you the ability to drag full colour sets into your current work seamlessly, saving you time. Always update your colour palettes PSD and mix and match your previous colour sets to create new ones to allow colour diversity in your art."

Set up for screenprinting: "90 per cent of my work is set up for screenprinting. The best and most effective way to set a design up is to prepare before you start. Every colour must be on a separate layer and stacked accordingly. The linework is always my first layer, but in the end this layer will end up being the T-shirt colour so it must be at the top to Select>Load Selection>Example Layer, then Edit>Clear from each colour layer that is underneath the linework layer. The last layer in your layer menu is a fill of what colour you will be using for your shirt. You must also do the same thing for each colour layer that is over the top of another colour layer to ensure zero overlap when printing."

© Tim Hastings

15. BLENDING MODES, TEXTURES AND MASKS

Emi Haze (**www.emihaze.com**) is a freelance digital artist and illustrator, whose work retains a traditional, handmade feel thanks to the blending of many media elements, including photography and custom textures. He draws on his experience in traditional media to give his digital work this tangible feeling, as he explains: "Before working in digital art and illustration, I [started out in] drawing, painting and later graphics. I always loved the gesture and the warmth of creating a sketch, in the stroke of acrylic or oil colour, in the splashes of watercolour or ink. So [nowadays], when I start developing an image I try to include my manual skill in the design and in the use of colour, digitally importing it into my artwork. [In a single image] I combine hundreds of Photoshop layers with many and many graphic elements and textures. All of the blending modes, layer masks and adjustment layers I use, make the starting image less digital and more similar to a painting or drawing.

"This phase of manual elaboration is then merged with a strictly digital phase. Selecting parts of different photo images, I try to blend, using the double exposure technique, the human body with nature and its four elements: fire, air, water and earth. The result is the vision of an imaginative world hanging between reality and fantasy, dream and utopia, and in which colour and sensitivity have the predominant role."

© Emi Haze

© Eric Proctor

16. MASTER PHOTOSHOP'S ADJUSTMENT TOOLS

Digital artist Eric Proctor (**www.tsaoshin.deviantart.com**) says that his top tip for better illustrations is to master colour control using Photoshop's tools: "Learn to use the colour-adjusting tools such as Curves, Levels and Color Balance. These tools are some of Photoshop's strongest assets and can help you see imbalances in your work as you compose. I often fuss with the colour in my paintings through these tools. They help me to create broader colour palettes or correct lighting problems, especially early on in the painting when I'm laying down the initial palette. I find that working with the Curves tool and Color Balance, I can shift a painting away from looking murky or cloudy to something more vibrant and saturated. Before I finalise any painting, I tend to do a final run of colour adjustments to add the last bit of pop."

© Giulio Rossi

17. CUSTOMISE PHOTOSHOP FOR YOUR TABLET

Giulio Rossi (**www.behance.net/giuliorossi**) creates his striking character designs using a graphics tablet, which is an important tool for many digital artists and illustrators. However, how you use it is key if you want to improve the quality of your illustrations. Rossi doesn't change a lot from the default settings of his tablet, but he does "assign specific keyboard shortcuts for each software [that he uses], but it really depends on the graphic tablets model you're working with." His general advice is to customise your Photoshop workspace to make working with the tablet easier: "I suggest everyone customises the Photoshop user interface and creates different ones according to the type of work you have to do. I have my own working space for digital painting (which is very minimal with only the tools and panels I actually use to create an illustration: Layers, Brush Presets, Color, Swatches) and another one I use when I have to work for different projects. So more complex than the other one, with more icons of the tools I need, for instance, to organise, align [and] modify the elements inside the page such as text, shapes."

Finally, if you are using a tablet a lot, then the kit needs to be right for you: "An ergonomic comfortable stylus with a pressure-sensitive tablet is crucial to get your best potential in drawing in the most natural way possible, but you can also improve it by changing the Opacity and the Flow of the brushes so you can work easily at your own pace."

18. FOLLOW A LAYER-BASED WORKFLOW

© Tim Hastings

Graphic designer and illustrator Tim Hastings (**www.mindkillerink.com**) explains how he builds up his designs: "My typical workflow process begins with at least a day's worth of working on another project that is already in progress, while having the next project in the back of my mind, conceptually planning it out in my head and visualising what direction to go with. After sufficient mental planning, I will begin digital composition sketches, usually around three for client commissioned work. After composition sketches are complete, I generally let the client view them, then we review and see which has the best direction. When a final sketch is decided upon, the process is always the same. I begin the linework phase; this generally is 60 per cent of the final illustration, combining the darkest shadows and linework into a single layer, while the sketch is on another layer at low opacity and locked to ensure I stay on the correct layer at all times. Upon the completion of the linework, I again get feedback from the client, and once all is approved I move to colour. Colour is generally predetermined by the composition sketch phase and then it's a process of stepping each colour layer by layer until the final illustration is complete. Finally, I explore other colour options, see what set works the best and send it off to the client, and then usually set it up for printing. This whole process can take anywhere from eight to 20 [plus] hours, depending on the complexity of the concept being illustrated."

© Anna Wardle

19. WORK WITH THE EYEDROPPER TOOL

Anna Lisa Wardle (**www.annaillustrations.wordpress.com**) is a UK-based freelance illustrator who creates work focused on pattern, design and colour, with a distinct style and a portfolio stacked with engaging portraits. Her key Photoshop trick lies in a less-used tool: the Eyedropper. "Having a favourite tool is relative to your style. For me, it would be the Eyedropper tool. It is perfect for blending. I use Eyedropper tool constantly, literally every second when painting. It is amazing for picking colour samples from any image you find and applying it to your work. This really broadens your mind when thinking about colour. Blending becomes easier when you use the shortcut (Opt/Alt) to access it rather than pressing it separately on the toolbar. If you have a graphics tablet you can hotkey it, which saves time enormously."

20. USE PHOTOS AS A BASE

EMI HAZE EXPLAINS HOW HIS ILLUSTRATIONS START FROM A PHOTO AND ARE BUILT UP WITH TEXTURES AND HANDMADE ELEMENTS

© Emi Haze

01 PHOTO RETOUCHING

"The artwork starts from a photo and the first step is its retouching. I cut out the subject from the background with a selection usually using Pen and Lasso tools, working with a tablet, and create a bitmap mask. Then I remove part of the image to prepare it for the next step."

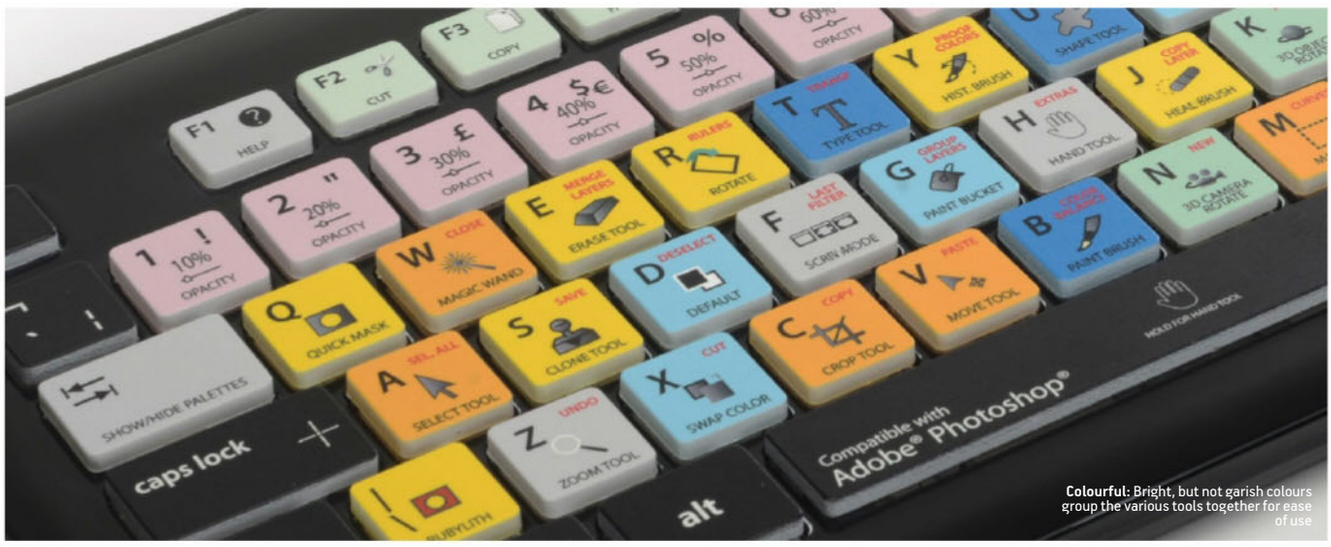
02 HANDMADE ELEMENTS

"I do various handmade elements, such as scratches, ink marks, acrylic or watercolour stains, which I digitally import in the work. I merge all these elements with the subject, using blending modes, adjustment layers, various bitmap/vector masks and selection tools."

03 IMAGE PROCESSING AND COLOUR CORRECTION

"I select from other photos different natural elements and I import them on separate layers, trying to melt them to the subject with the double exposure technique. In the end, after numerous retouchings to finish the work, I proceed with the final colour correction of the image using adjustments layers."

Perfect addition: Designed to help every designers' workflow, speed and accuracy



Colourful: Bright, but not garish colours group the various tools together for ease of use

EDITORS KEYS ADOBE PHOTOSHOP CC BACKLIT KEYBOARD

WILL THIS KEYBOARD DEVOTED TO THE COMMANDS AND SHORTCUTS OF PHOTOSHOP BENEFIT THE AVERAGE DESIGNER'S WORKFLOW OR IS IT JUST ANOTHER GIMMICK LACKING PRACTICALITY?

www.editorskeys.com

SPECIFICATIONS:

- **Windows and Mac compatible**
- **USB connectivity**

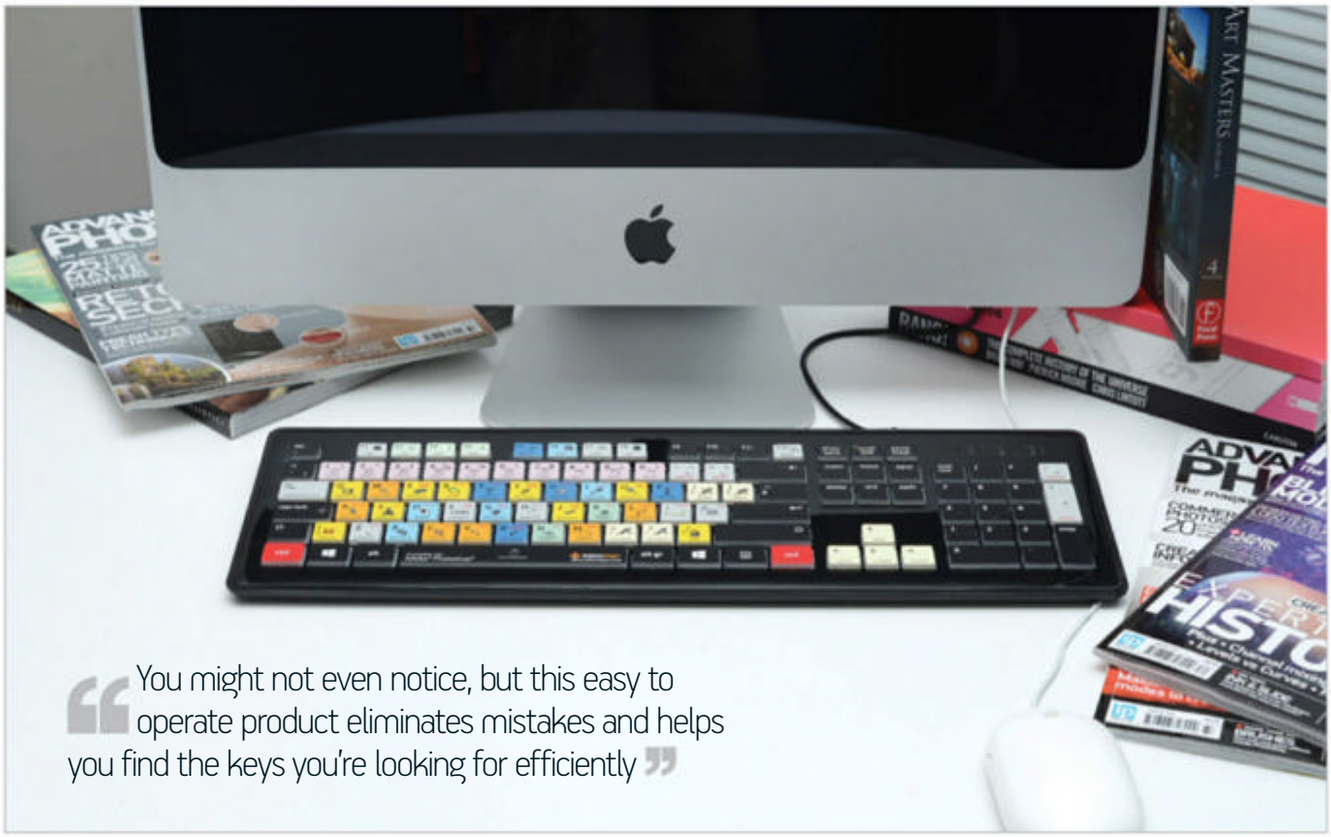
£100
$149 (APPROX)

Digital art and designing are time-consuming hobbies. Photoshop users are always looking for ways to get through their workflow quicker, whether that's through using Actions to make life easier, personalising the most-used parts of the program into shortcuts, or even just colour-coding layers to save time flicking through them. There are hundreds of ways that you can quicken your design workflow, and Photoshop offers some handy tips.

In terms of hardware though, besides the obvious choice of a graphics tablet, keyboards specific to Photoshop are also worth checking out. The idea is that by having shortcuts printed onto keys, these keyboards can save you time; Editors Keys claim that they can help you edit up to 40 per cent faster. They also boast their collaboration with leading opticians in order to create a product that helps to prevent eye-strain.

First impressions of the Editors Keys keyboard are good. It's sleek, light, and measures in at 48cm long; that's enough space dedicated to the keys without it being too big to transport. The keys are assorted into groups of colours, but retain a tastefulness in design, with pastel shades of yellow, pale blue, white and lilac. It's a great-looking product, one that looks professional, and it's a great idea for anyone familiarising themselves with the commands of Photoshop. But can the Editors Keys keyboard also benefit the more advanced user?

Backlit: Editors Keys has collaborated with leading opticians to create a keyboard that helps to tackle eye-strain



> You might not even notice, but this easy to operate product eliminates mistakes and helps you find the keys you're looking for efficiently

AM ONE CLEAN KEYBOARD CLEANER

If you're going to spend £100 on a keyboard, you're going to want to keep it as shiny and new looking as the day you bought it.

All keyboards end up showing a bit of wear and tear, but Editors Keys themselves recommend the AM One Clean Keyboard cleaner to use in conjunction with your new Photoshop keyboard. The cleaning unit comes with both a sponge and a spray in one, is refillable, and even looks pretty swanky too. Keyboards are an obvious source of germ-spreading, so to have an anti-bacterial unit that kills 99.9% of germs is a no brainer. This One Clean unit ticks all the boxes, making it simple to clean your keyboard without the risk of damage; something that all too often happens when you let liquid seep into a keyboard. The best thing about the product though is that it's available on the Editors Keys website for a very welcome price of £13. So keeping your new Photoshop keyboard looking good and performing smoothly needn't break the bank.

User-friendly: Having Photoshop's keyboard commands at your fingertips makes photo editing easier

As expected for a product so useful to Photoshop beginners, it's extremely user-friendly. There are no drivers to install: all you have to do is simply plug it in and begin. The keys resemble those of most laptops too, but is slightly bigger than the average keyboard.

It may come as a surprise to most users of Photoshop, but the Editors Keys Photoshop keyboard has the potential to teach even a seasoned Photoshop veteran a few new tricks. Even if you know every single shortcut off by heart, the keyboard can aid with both key commands and Control commands; there's an icon on each key for visibility, the Control keys are red, and each Control command is written in a smaller font on the key in the same red. Everything is handily grouped in colour, with the opacities coloured pink and the drawing tools being royal blue.

It's little details like this that make the Editors Keys Photoshop keyboard as much for the professional as the beginner. You might not even notice, but this easy to operate product eliminates mistakes and helps you find the keys you're looking for efficiently.

Additionally, the keyboard is backlit to help with working in a dark room, any glare is hidden under the keys and the colours of the keys are still visible. It's touches like this that give the keyboard both substance and style; it's a product that most will buy for its usefulness, but also because it's a cool aesthetic addition to your computer set-up.

Practical: Super thin, sleek design

Photoshop tools: You'll learn a few tricks about advanced keyboard shortcuts and tool functions thanks to this keyboard

Clear: The tools are named and illustrated on each key, for extra clarity

The Editors Keys Photoshop CC keyboard is one of those products that you won't believe you ever survived without. If you're someone who doesn't rely on shortcuts all that often, the keyboard will change the way you work, and if you are someone who likes using commands, it's there to speed you up and stop you from making simple errors.

There's a fine line between simple and simplistic though, and this keyboard just about teeters on the edge. If the LED backlight is a little bright for you, there's only the one setting unfortunately, but that's a minor quibble. The lack of height offered by the tiny feet either side of the keyboard is another gripe, but then the Editors Keys kit is designed to simply replace your existing keyboard: it doesn't necessarily have to be any more compact, adjustable or even that much more stylish than your original keyboard, especially when it offers you a quick guide to the whole of Photoshop so simply. Ultimately, the product as a whole is ingenious, cool and practical, but also very understated.

While it's perhaps a long stretch to say every designer should own a piece of kit like this, it's certainly true that just about everyone could benefit from it, whether they need a little help remembering the commands, or whether they're a seasoned professional. The Editors Keys Photoshop CC keyboard can be the silent hero of your workflow, helping you reach the shortcuts of Photoshop without you even noticing.

CHECK OUT THE ALTERNATIVES

ADOBE PHOTOSHOP CC - PREMIUM APPLE MAC DEDICATED KEYBOARD

www.lg.com

£110 – Extremely similar to the backlit model, the Photoshop CC Apple Mac Dedicated version of the keyboard feels much more like an Apple product. If you're a Photoshop user with an Apple set-up and want to continue with the aesthetic you've already got, this is probably the keyboard for you. It doesn't stand out as much as the black model, and naturally it only works with a Mac. It also doesn't include the backlight that the cheaper model boasts.

EDITORS KEYS ULTRA THIN SILICON KEYBOARD COVER

www.eizoglobal.com

£35 – If you're rather attached to the keyboard you're using at the moment but you'd like the added benefit of seeing the Photoshop commands on your keys, the Editors Keys keyboard cover might be worth investing in instead. Not quite as professional or cool-looking as a wide keyboard, but just as useful. Obviously missing the backlight too.

MIUXE ADOBE PHOTOSHOP KEYBOARD STICKERS

www.nec.com

£9 – Cheaper still, Miuxe offers colourful stickers with black letters, designed to replace the familiar keys of a Mac. This feels nicer than silicon, but there's always the danger of the stickers peeling off; plus, there's no guarantee they won't come off when you clean your keyboard. Perhaps the option to go for if you're looking to give Photoshop keys a trial run.

VERDICT

Features: **7/10**
Ease of use: **10/10**
Quality of results: **9/10**
Value for money: **7/10**

FINAL SCORE: 8/10

PAINTSTORM STUDIO

COMBINE THIS NEW PAINTING SOFTWARE WITH PHOTOSHOP'S EDITING TOOLS AND ACHIEVE INCREDIBLE ILLUSTRATIVE EFFECTS

www.paintstormstudio.com

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- **Windows Vista or later**
- **2GB Memory or greater**
- **100MB HDD space**

$19
£13 (APPROX)

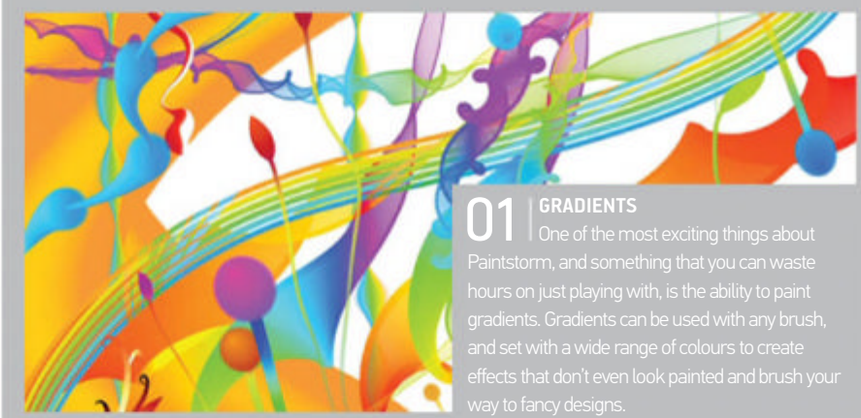
Painting is one of the hardest digital art forms to master, but one of the more fun exercises to let your imagination run wild with, using a graphics tablet, a little imagination and a good painting program. So many programs have to compromise between accessibility and quality; painting is a talent that everyone would love to master, but how can you make it exciting for novices, without alienating the more comfortable artists?

Paintstorm Studio places itself firmly as a program for the more experienced digital painters, but it's still one of the more enjoyable options on the market. This comes from the visual nature of the program; menus are fully moveable and customisable in colour and opacity, which are packed with features, options, tools and brushes. The focal point is the Mixer to the right-hand side of the program, which can be used in just the same way as a painter's palette, as you mix previous colours with new shades in your picture. As you start painting onto an image, the colours of the background conflate slightly with those that you brush onto your canvas, with the intelligent Dirty Mode. From the start, Paintstorm feels extremely realistic, and it's this realism that makes the program so in-depth.

Not only is Paintstorm extremely authentic, with the styles of brushes, their reactions to a canvas and the way that the colours blend and mix with each other, it also has many other exciting features to try out. There is a respectable number of brushes to choose from, which have the ability to paint in either solid colour or gradient, and numerous other alterations, including shape, angle, scatter, stabilisation and opacity of the trail. The program also boasts Post Stroke Correction, which offers a touch-up of your brushing as you're working.

KEY FEATURES

HOW DO SOME OF PAINTSTORM'S TOOLS PERFORM WHEN PUT INTO PRACTICE?



01 GRADIENTS

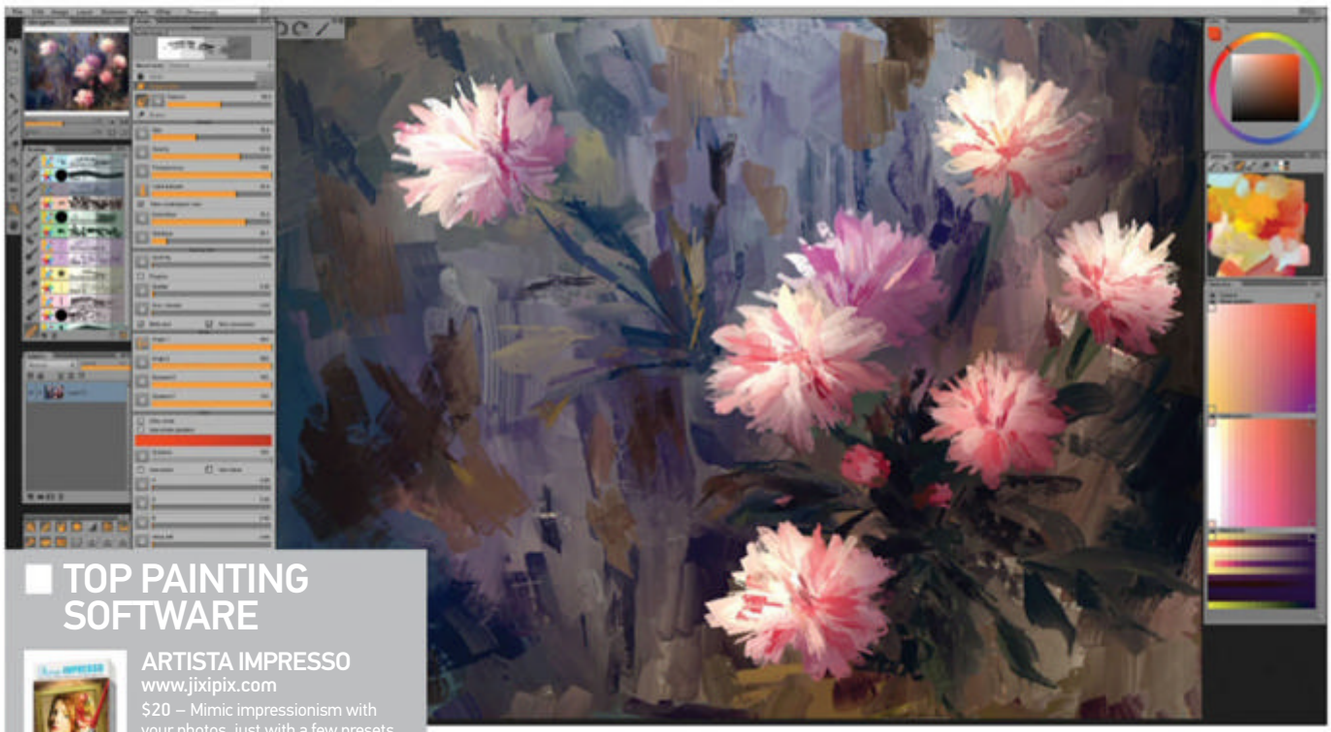
One of the most exciting things about Paintstorm, and something that you can waste hours on just playing with, is the ability to paint gradients. Gradients can be used with any brush, and set with a wide range of colours to create effects that don't even look painted and brush your way to fancy designs.

02 POST STROKE CORRECTION

Use Post Stroke Correction to alter your pictures as you're brushing them. This means that you can have total command over exactly how a brush stroke should look, without having to accurately paint over and over again until you get it right. Here, Post Stroke Correction was used to create the grass and the shooting stars.

03 PERSPECTIVE GUIDES

Set guides to help you paint more precisely and manage depth of horizons. The Perspective Guides help you paint from far away to closer up, retaining the exact size and scale of the brush you need. This eliminates the need to judge perspective when you brush and just allows you to be as creative as you need to be with your painting.



TOP PAINTING SOFTWARE

ARTISTA IMPRESSO
www.jixipix.com

$20 – Mimic impressionism with your photos, just with a few presets and sliders. This software is great to play around with and perfect on the go as a smartphone app.

COREL PAINTER
www.corel.com

£280/$418 – Perhaps the go-to program specifically built for digital painting, Corel is almost the complete package; it's user-friendly, it's eclectic and it's compatible with everything from bitmaps to Photoshop documents.

ARTRAGE STUDIO PRO
www.artrage.com

$50 – A more basic program than others, but does have most of the right tools nonetheless. The lack of a mixing palette is disappointing, but provides fifteen different tools for drawing or painting. Again, available on a smartphone.

AUTODESK SKETCHBOOK PRO
www.autodesk.com

$65 – Autodesk SketchBook Pro is powerful but simple. There aren't as manyy options available in the software for drawing as there is with other competitors, but the quality of the tools on offer can rival almost any program.

PIXARRA TWISTEDBRUSH PRO STUDIO 19
www.pixarra.com

$99 – TwistedBrush Pro lacks any kind of preset or ability to auto-paint, but with the number of brushes on offer with this software, along with the superb blending capabilities, it's a program for any professional to seriously consider.

> "Paintstorm never loses the essence of playfulness that makes digital painting so appealing in the first place"

Paintstorm is fully equipped to handle any kind of artwork, whether you're looking to touch up an already painted picture, turn a photo into a realistic painting or start completely from scratch. Parameters are optional, and can be set to keep perspective while you're brushing, to avoid having to resize your brush with every stroke.

Whilst there are so many hundreds of options and so much to explore in the program, Paintstorm never loses the essence of playfulness that makes digital painting so appealing in the first place. A great tool for the expert and a fun one for the beginner.

VERDICT

Features: **8/10**
Ease of use: **8/10**
Quality of results: **9/10**
Value for money: **9/10**

FINAL SCORE: 9/10

An impressive piece of software with limitless potential, Paintstorm is well worth any digital painter delving into

DARE TO DREAM

CONCEPT ARTIST AND PHOTOSHOP INSTRUCTOR BENEDICK BANA TALKS ABOUT WORKING DAY AND NIGHT, AND HOW HE HOPES TO ONE DAY BE PART OF A MASSIVE SCI-FI PROJECT LIKE *STAR WARS*

Benedick Bana is a concept artist from the Philippines who also teaches art, animation and Photoshop. We caught up with him to find out more about how he started out, what truly inspires him and what the future could hold for him and his unique art style.

WHEN DID YOU START USING PHOTOSHOP?

I have been using Photoshop for the last 14 years, during four years of college and ten years as an instructor and freelance concept artist. The other software packages I use are Adobe Illustrator and After Effects.

HOW DID YOU START WORKING AS A PRO?

I started as a freelance artist working online. My first work was to create logo illustrations and character illustrations. I then expanded my portfolio and joined several art community sites to showcase my artworks. It was through these sites that I was contacted by clients and was asked to do concept arts for their game projects, indie film projects, and so on. And as well as that, I am now a full-time instructor teaching basic sketching, Photoshop and animation to both undergraduate and graduate students in the Digital Arts and Computer Animation Department of Ateneo de Naga University, Naga City, in the Philippines.

WHAT'S A TYPICAL DAY FOR YOU?

Well, I am a full-time instructor at the university by day, and an online artist at night. It is in the evenings and throughout the nighttime that I usually work from home, taking [on] online projects such as character

OUR READER
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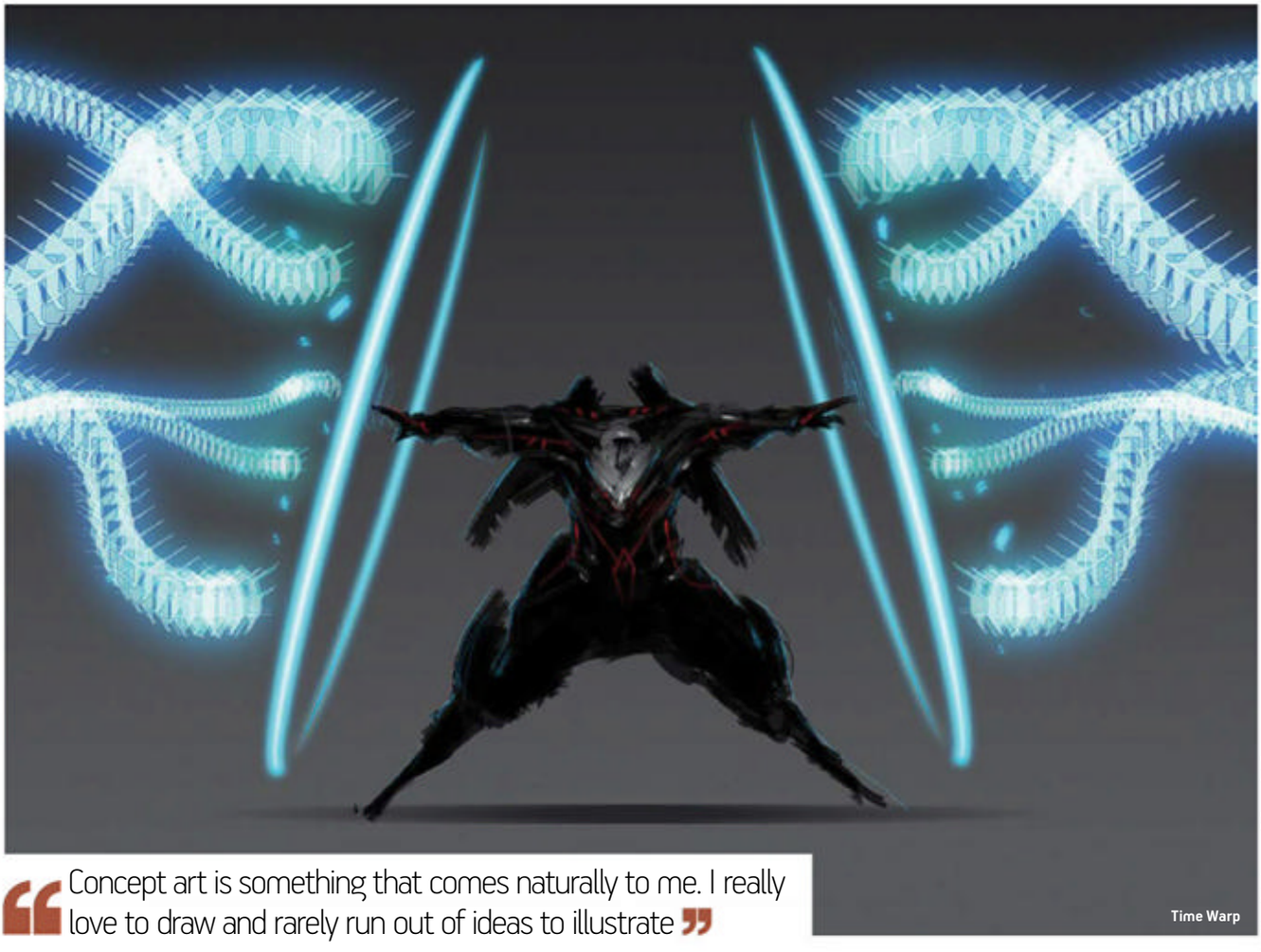


Time Warp

> "Concept art is something that comes naturally to me. I really love to draw and rarely run out of ideas to illustrate"

All article images © Benedick Bana

Meteor: There's a simplicity of style and a lightness of brush that makes Bana's work so appealing as concept art

Sol Blade: Outside of his job as a Photoshop instructor, Bana has worked on character designs, logos, and illustrations for "varied purposes such as games, mobile phones, card-based illustrations, websites and so on"

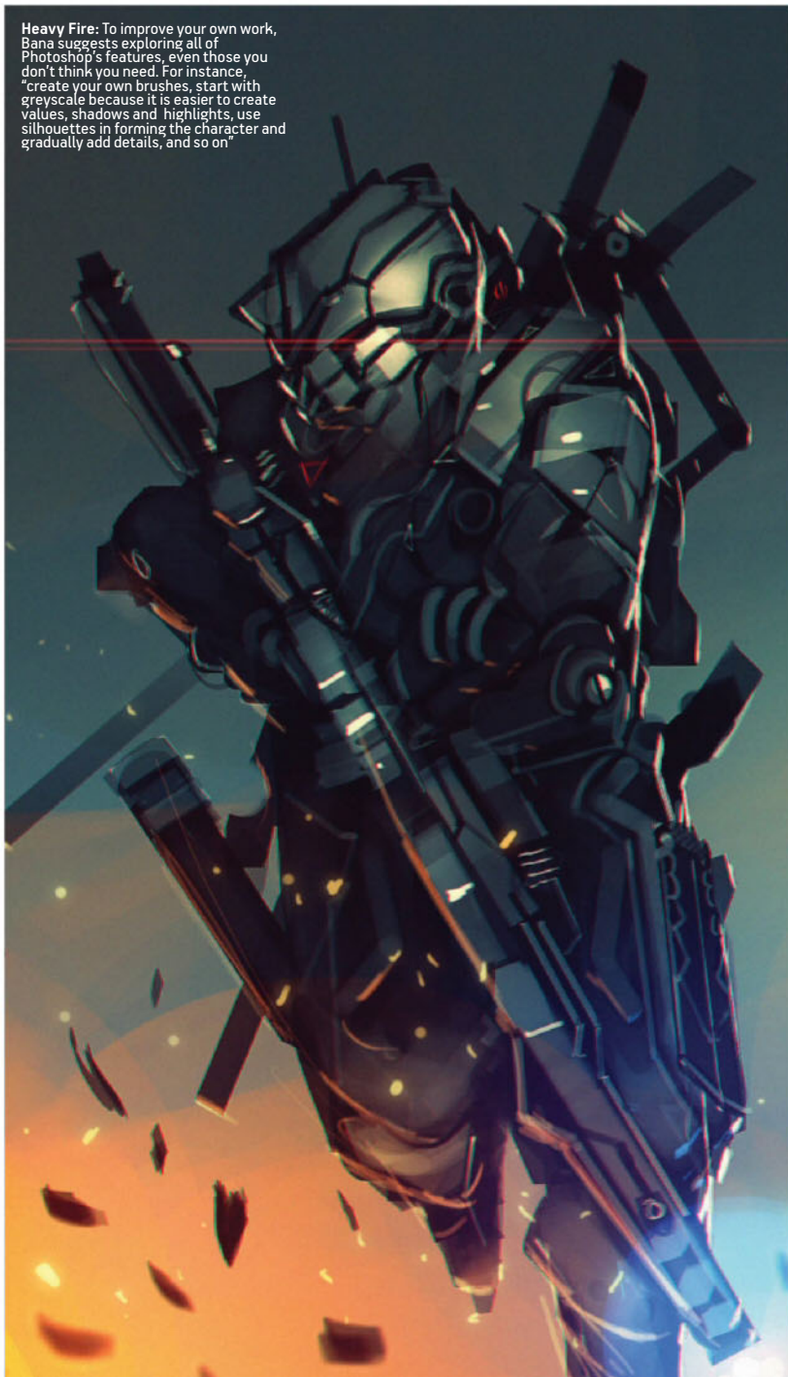
Codename 75: Right now, Bana is spending his nights working on a second issue of a sci-fi/horror motion comic project

Anubis

Hot Space Chick

> Learning from other artists helps me not only to create a unique identity for my sci-fi artworks but also to go out of my comfort zone sometimes

Drag Buster: "I am more into sci-fi themes and when I create concept designs, I usually use flat brushes [and] geometric brushes to give a more mechanical feel to each detail," says Bana



Heavy Fire: To improve your own work, Bana suggests exploring all of Photoshop's features, even those you don't think you need. For instance, "create your own brushes, start with greyscale because it is easier to create values, shadows and highlights, use silhouettes in forming the character and gradually add details, and so on"

commissions and creating assets for a game or film. It is a good thing I am highly nocturnal, I usually go to sleep at around 2am.

WHAT ARE YOUR FAVOURITE PHOTOSHOP FEATURES AND TOOLS?

I always use Brush tools, [the] new tools for better and easy editing, the famous Blur setting, and image adjustments. I use most of them for my digital painting.

WHAT INSPIRES YOU?

I am especially inclined towards watching sci-fi and fantasy movies and playing sci-fi games because mech and gigantic robots appeal to me. I have always been fond of watching sci-fi movies, even when I was a kid. The *Star Wars* saga was one of the things that had a great impact on me. I especially like how the characters were created, their unique weapons such as the Light Sabers and the settings and environments. It was then when I started being interested in drawing mechanical shapes and integrating human forms [with them]. Because of my interest in sci-fi, I learned how to integrate photos with paintings using Photoshop, which is called photobashing by other artists. I am also inspired by other professional artists in the industry who have the same or similar approach as mine in doing sci-fi art. Learning from other artists helps me not only to create a unique identity for my sci-fi artworks but also to go out of my comfort zone sometimes and explore more of what is quite challenging for me, such as doing human and monster designs that don't have a sci-fi feel to them.

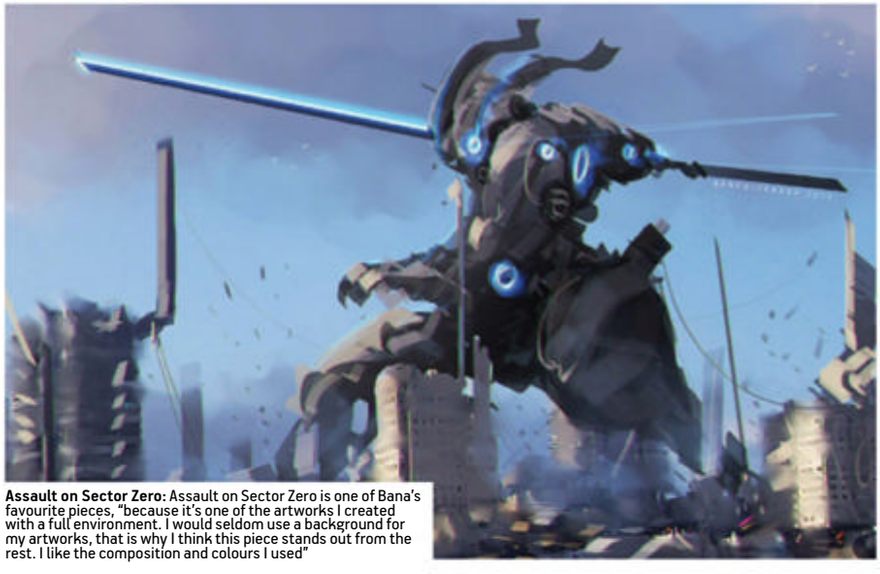
WHAT IT IS ABOUT CONCEPT ART THAT REALLY EXCITES YOU?

Concept art is something that comes naturally to me. I really love to draw and rarely run out of ideas to illustrate. This is what I find most appealing and exciting. On the other hand, what challenges me most is doing a detailed digital painting of a human.

DESIGN TIPS

"Draw every day," says Bana, when asked how other digital artists can improve their work. "Grow in this area every day. Dedicate a time each day to sketch your ideas into paper or digitally." He also suggests that you "Learn from other artists, too. Be open to criticism and the suggestions of others who see your work. And work on it. Manage to try other styles but do not forget to hone your own style and signature." Last of all, Bana says "Experiment all the time. Do research and look for references to get ideas about the characters you wish to create," and always "explore the many features of Photoshop" to find and refine your style.

Female Warrior Lumina: Bana likes working on commissioned projects, because he "can express my art and apply my style while ensuring that my clients' standards and plans for their projects are also satisfied. By doing so, I don't feel stagnant as there's a never-ending opportunity to improve my craft"



Assault on Sector Zero: Assault on Sector Zero is one of Bana's favourite pieces, "because it's one of the artworks I created with a full environment. I would seldom use a background for my artworks, that is why I think this piece stands out from the rest. I like the composition and colours I used"

HOW HAVE YOUR PROCESSES, AND THE WAY YOU USE PHOTOSHOP, CHANGED SINCE YOU FIRST STARTED OUT?

I started working through the traditional way, sketching the subject using a pencil and having it scanned before I could finally apply colours [to] it. But now, I sketch, paint and colour directly using Wacom Intuos 4 and Photoshop.

FINALLY, WHAT ARE YOUR AMBITIONS FOR THE FUTURE?

While I am happy teaching student artists, I also dream of being able to work in a big animation industry, doing concept designs for films. [But also], I want to expand my portfolio even more and be given opportunities through which I can help other artists to develop their skills in creating concept art.

GATHER THE PROJECT MATERIALS

MATERIALS YOU CAN USE TO CREATE FLOWER BRUSHES

Flowers: For this project you will need a variety of flowers in a range of shapes and sizes; the types of flowers is up to you

Paper: You will need a piece of drawing paper if you want to draw flowers to turn into brushes

Pens: A variety of different sized pens will be useful for drawing flowers because pencils will not scan as well

Craft Knife: You will be needing a craft knife to precisely cut the flowers for photographing or scanning them

MAKE FLOWER BRUSHES

LEARN HOW TO MAKE CREATIVE BRUSHES FROM FLOWERS

When the cold grey of winter has given way to the bright warmth of spring, this brings about bright colours, warm weather and of course flowers. These colourful blossoms are ideal for crafting your own digital resources in Photoshop at any time of year. In this tutorial we will help you create your own flower Photoshop brushes from real flowers. You can use wildflowers, cut flowers or even flowers from your own garden. This is a great way to connect the outdoors with the indoors, and the natural elements with digital design. It puts a little bit of spring in your designs both literally and figuratively. In this tutorial we've used cut flowers of many varieties, such as lilies, daisies and chrysanthemums. Of course the brushes that you make will be unique to where you live, what flowers can be grown there, or the flowers you buy. They don't just have to be springtime blooms either – try these techniques with leaves, flowers and seeds all year round.

CREATE FLOWER BRUSHES

USE REAL FLOWERS TO CREATE USEFUL BRUSHES

01 OFF WITH THEIR HEADS

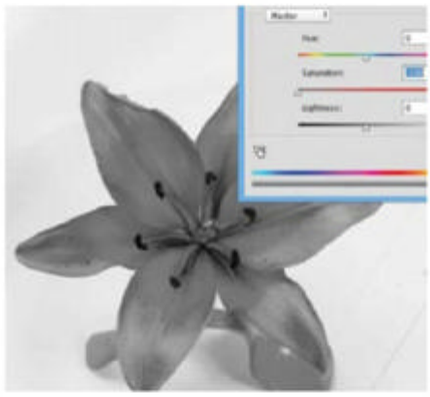
Using your craft knife, cut as close to the petals of the flower as you can without making the flower come apart. If you want the stem in the brush just cut lower down the stem.

02 LIGHT THEM WELL

In order to make your job in Photoshop easier, make sure your lighting is even. There shouldn't be sharp shadows on the petals or the background. Use diffused light and a white background.

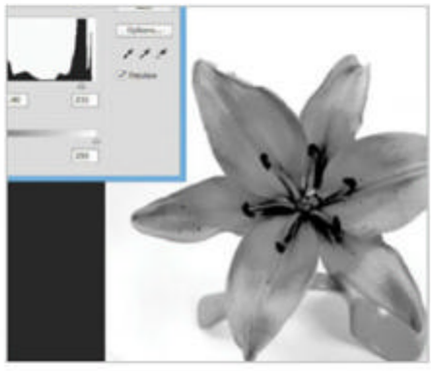
03 PHOTOGRAPH THE FLORA

Photograph your flowers quickly after cutting them so they don't wilt. If needed, prop the flowers up to get a straight-on shot but don't be afraid to have many shots at different angles.



04 CONVERT TO BLACK-AND-WHITE

Once you've photographed your flowers, select the clearest images and open them in Photoshop. Then simply desaturate the image to start the process of making it into a brush.



05 ADJUST THE LEVELS

Using the Levels dialogue box, make the whites whiter until the background is perfectly white, and adjust the blacks as greys so they look good. Remember the closer to white, the more transparent the brush will be.

06 CREATE THE BRUSH

Under the Edit menu click Define Brush Preset. Look at the thumbnail on the left side, if the brush is super-small with lots of space around it, it could mean your whites aren't white.

THINGS TO AVOID

AVOID DOING THESE THINGS WHEN PHOTOGRAPHING FLOWERS TO MAKE YOUR LIFE EASIER

When photographing flowers for brushes you have to be aware of both the flower and the surroundings. Here are some things to avoid to make your work in Photoshop both easier and better looking.

Don't use white flowers: Especially if you have a white background, avoid photographing white or yellow flowers as they won't have defined edges and will be difficult to isolate

Don't photograph bouquets: While you can photograph groups of flowers, don't just take a picture of your table arrangement, it will be too big and messy to make a good brush

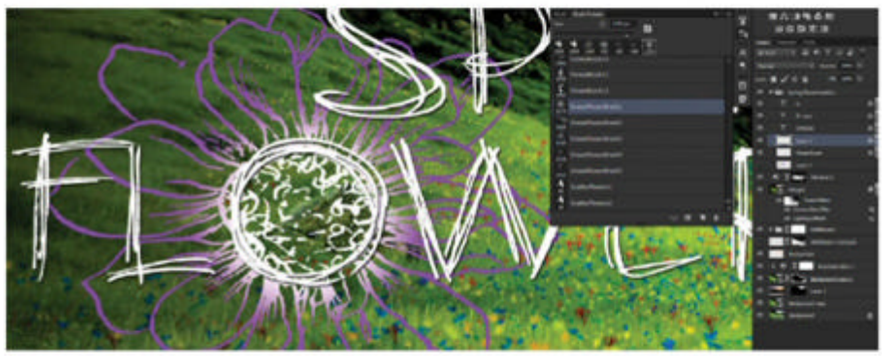
Don't hold your flowers: Holding the flower so you can see inside may be good in theory but it makes it hard for the camera to auto focus and it will be difficult to isolate

Don't Ignore the flower: Look at the flower and pay attention to which parts are light and dark. Here the inside of the flower is dark and will make an unusable brush as opposed to if it were more evenly lit

CUSTOM FLOWER BRUSHES

HOW TO USE THE RESOURCES TO CREATE A WILDFLOWER EFFECT

One of the most useful applications of these custom floral brushes is the ability to quickly and easily fill a field with wildflowers. The key lies in the settings for the brushes found in the Brush panel. Begin by increasing the Spacing found in the Brush Tip Shape tab. Then add in some Scattering, some angle and size Jitter, engage the Flip X Jitter and add a touch of Color Dynamics to give a slight jitter to the Hue setting. These values all require a bit of experimentation to get right. Once the brush is set as you like it, carefully begin filling the fields with flowers. Start with the background using a small brush size and tight spacing. Then increase both of those as you move towards the foreground. If this all seems confusing, be sure to check out the video tutorial where we explain it click by click!



DRAW YOUR BRUSHES

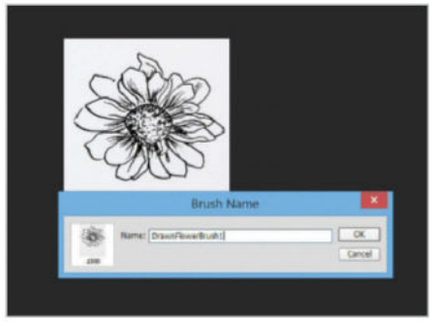
CREATE YOUR OWN BRUSHES FROM DRAWINGS

01 **DRAW SOME FLOWERS**

Using pens, draw the flowers. This seems simple but you have to make a lot of decisions because the brush will look exactly like your drawing. Experiment with just outlines as well as different shading techniques for different looking brushes.

02 **SCAN YOUR DRAWINGS**

Once you've drawn your flowers, scan them or photograph them. Make sure you leave enough space between the drawings so that you can crop each brush individually later.



03 **CREATE THE BRUSH**

As you're defining your brush, don't assume because it's ink on white paper that it will be a clean brush. Look at the thumbnail to make sure you don't have a grey rectangle as pictured here.

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FLOWER BRUSHES

12 FLOWER BRUSHES FROM PHOTOS

These brushes are carefully isolated from the photos in our project and work great for adding a splash of natural colour to any design.

DRAWN FLOWER BRUSHES

HAND DRAWN FLOWER BRUSHES

These illustrated floral brushes are perfect for crafting a hand drawn effect to adorn a headline or other text effect.

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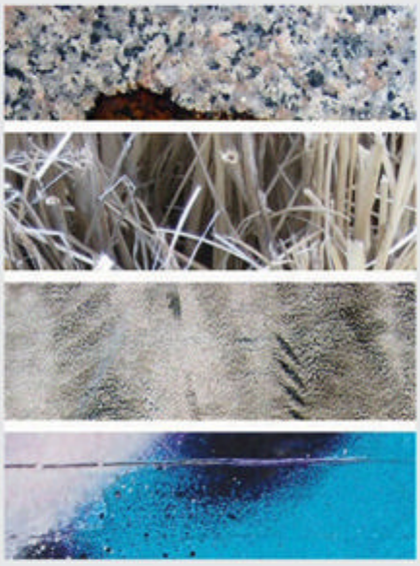

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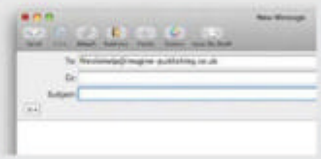

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